# Collected Papers on Romance and Tragedy from Shakespeare to Tolstoy

## A Prospectus on the Future

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# Contents

Also by John O'Meara

*Remembering Shakespeare*

*The Way of Novalis*

*The Riddle of the Sophia*

*Tragical Historical*

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*We shall need to live again, and live hard, for, once our great civilized form is broken, and we are at last born into the open sky, we shall have a whole new universe to grow up into, and to find relations with.*[1]

[1] From *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine*, Cambridge University Press, 1988, orig.pub., 1925, p.294.

# Preface

The papers made available here, which are among my very latest and very likely to be among my last, are offered by way of elucidating what I see as the upshot of a long history of cultural developments whose import is in need of being more clearly configured as we move forward both spiritually and imaginatively into the future. My focus has been on what emerges from this panorama of developments as a revelation whose contours have yet to be full defined but which are already outlined sufficiently for us to begin to fathom what our direction will have to be from here.

These contours might have been ordered for our perception otherwise than as I have. But the main areas of consideration are represented here. They concern how we are to think of our relationship to romance and to tragedy as the two principal features that have marked human experience in the age in which we have found ourselves ever since the time of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. How these two features amalgamate to constitute one overriding and inescapable challenge since then, as I see it and have experienced it, is best represented by Shakespeare and Novalis. They combine in these authors in two highly different ways corresponding to the peculiar demands of their respective periods, though these, the Renaissance and the Modern Romantic, otherwise unfold in a far-reaching historical continuum that has an evolutionary significance in itself. More is to come historically from a consideration of this evolution that we can further project on the basis of the more secure revelations that have come forth about it from two luminaries in our time, namely Rudolf Steiner and Robert Powell. Involved in this evolution is a progressively more established form of engagement with all that the Sophia-being Who *inheres* Nature can bring of a full grounding in the *process* of that evolution.

The first three sections of the chapter in **Part I** are hereby accounted for. Along this way, the reader will also find indications as to how Shakespeare and Novalis relate to other ground-breaking authors in this evolutionary continuum, moving on from the Romantic into our own Modern period. These authors include William Wordsworth and Robert Graves, who are considered in depth elsewhere in my work, along with Rainer Maria Rilke.

How an experience of Tragic Romance bears inalienably on the prospect of our further evolution into a Higher Life of Sophianic development constitutes the main focus of these sections. More is offered by way of elaboration on this score in the so-called 'Endnotes' that follow, notably Endnotes 3 and 4. In Endnote 3, I enter more closely into the inner dynamic of this evolution with reference to Steiner's incomparable account of this in the first of His Mystery

Dramas. Contrasting with this presentation, in Endnote 4, is an extensive discussion of how Goethe for his part falls short of undertaking the full evolutionary process that is accounted for here. In Endnote 6, I venture additionally into an account based on material by Vladimir Solovyov that pictures that specific *form* of poetic creativity that would properly orient us towards the future through its commitment to, and immersion in, a specifically Sophianic basis to our relationship to Nature and the World.

In **Parts II and III**, Novalis and Shakespeare are brought forward as the major embodiments hitherto of this commitment. My elaborations of their achievement, given the limited scope of this collection, are inevitably summarial and representative only. The reader is further referred to my full-scale books on these authors, *Remembering Shakespeare* and *The Way of Novalis*. In Part II, as in Part I, the association between Novalis and Robert Powell is brought forward; in Part III, as in Part I, Shakespeare is again referred to Rudolf Steiner. Among all four cases, across the variation in terms, the basic evolutionary development in focus is the same: through a fundamental, difficult process of Self-Confrontation, at last the breaking through of an *Inspirited* Self that further unfolds as a distinctive experience of (cosmic) Sophianic Nature and of the World as grounded in Christ. In Shakespeare, these coordinate processes of Self, Nature, and the World, correspond with his sequential creation of *Pericles*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*. In Part III, I associate this sequence further with the more specific psychological experiences of Imagination, Inspiration, and Intuition, as given in a corresponding account of the evolutionary development in question provided in our time by Rudolf Steiner.

In Chapter 2 of Part III, the further issue is raised concerning the difficult introduction of Steiner into modern critical discourse that has made invoking him, even today, a labor of appeal. I waive the apparent necessity of this task here. My own efforts in this regard are amply attested to in several of my other writings, produced over years, that include *The Thinking Spirit: Rudolf Steiner and Romantic Theory, A Collection of his Texts with Notes*.[2] Steiner's elaborations promised to be, more than fruitful, epoch-making. The evidence for this is in the success with which Owen Barfield brought these forward in some of the essays (the best among them) in his *Romanticism Comes of Age*, dating back to 1944. I had my own breakthrough with Shakespeare in the last part of my *Othello's Sacrifice* after coming across Barfield's expositions many years later. In the case of these expositions, it has struck me that nothing more crucial or timely in the way of cultural elaborations have appeared to help re-direct us in our greatly aimless time. Especially relevant for our purposes here is the case of the radically new, *conflicting* forms of cultural

[2] See also the last parts of *Remembering Shakespeare* and *The New School of the Imagination: Rudolf Steiner's Mystery Plays in Literary Tradition*.

experience with which the human soul was confronted in that cataclysmic transition that especially shaped our recent evolution from the Middle Ages into the Modern Age that we continue to inhabit and that *begins* with the Renaissance (as distinct from the period in the 20th century that is called "Modern"). It is these conflicting forms that originally play into the whole problem of Tragic Romance as this bears on our distinctive Modern experience, which Shakespeare captures pre-eminently in his mature tragedies, and which I set forth again here.

This experience, so utterly linked to our understanding of Shakespeare, is accounted for by Steiner in his own terms as a transition from the "Intellectual (or Mind) Soul Age" to the "Consciousness (or Spiritual) Soul Age." (The reader is asked to take note of this terminology for later reference in this collection.) In *Othello's Sacrifice* I elaborated on the foundational experience of our Modernity, so representatively conveyed by Shakespeare, building directly on Steiner's terms:

> *A life of thought and feeling given over to the world of the senses Steiner saw as the characteristic experience of the* Sentient Soul, (brought to a climax in the long period before the Greeks). *Where thought and feeling combine in the act of faith, we have the characteristic experience of the* Intellectual or Mind Soul (brought to maturity in the Classical-Medieval period). *The experience of the* Consciousness or Spiritual Soul*—of the self alone—appears in between these two Soul-experiences* (in our own distinctively Modern age)*, in absolute separation from them both, and is therefore ideally positioned to achieve a new evolutionary transformation of both.*
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> *The world of Shakespeare's Tragedies marks the point where the* Consciousness Soul *experience is brought to bear on inherited forms of faith and of sensual engagement that, for reasons that cannot be grasped at that time, have now to be renounced. The renunciation itself is a profoundly tragic experience. A perversely hopeful notion continues to be entertained at this time as to what it is that can be had in the way of 'faith' or a 'life of the senses.' Characteristically, a great power of 'faith' is being brought to bear on an experience of 'love' in sensual terms. And that is precisely what had become problematic as experience.*[3]

Barfield had been remarkably successful in formulating the profound bearing Steiner's teaching of the 3 'Souls' could have in the development of modern critical method generally. However, as I show, what Barfield had boldly initiated in these terms he shortly left behind. My chapter on Barfield in Part III plots the sad story of how he very soon capitulated to forces and influences that had from very early on put the Anthroposophical Society that stemmed from

[3] For a full account of this experience, see my *Remembering Shakespeare*, which includes a re-print of *Othello's Sacrifice*, p.125ff.

Steiner at loggerheads with the rest of modern cultural developments. My own work, years later, initially appeared in the context of that deadlock and the deadening impact it will have had over the intervening time. Barfield's failure to follow through with his cause, in respect of intentions specifically geared around Steiner's teaching of the 'Souls,' highlights the other side of a broader historical impasse that has featured, on the one hand, a civilisation in its last breath,[4] and, on the other, that promised anthroposophical breakthrough, extending to a full breadth of modern critical studies, hoped for and intended by Steiner, that was not able to properly materialize to set that civilization on a new course. Another full account in Endnote 2 of my chapter in Part I is exclusively focused on Robert Powell whose own career, in the meantime, has developed in a quiet peace that has grown more and more fruitful over time, to the point where we can expect something of moment to be happening in those quarters in due course. Significantly, as I write, there has been, for the first time, a crossing of the paths between the Anthroposophical Society and the broad independent culture that has developed around Powell. These are today growing movements, especially of late, and much is boded in their crossing of paths that, unfortunately, cannot be entered into here.

But there is, in any case, much to take into account in the meantime about a whole civilization gone by, *if*, that is, we are *not* to perpetuate the many presumptuous dispositions that, all together, have finally led it nowhere. I have offered a representative account of such sterile dispositions in my book, *Tragical Historical: Essays in Western Cultural History from Boethius to Beckett*. Among such dispositions, one might single out the overriding pretense, originating from very far back, to pre-empt the full basis of our human experience by insisting on a rational moralistic judgment of romantic love, which could only finally land that civilization in a chronic emotional and imaginative sterility. The chapters on Dostoevski and Tolstoy in **Part IV** of the present collection were intended to add to my extensive account of such attitudes in *Tragical Historical*. Dostoevski, in his profound critique of rational man, so extensive in his work as a whole, is to be set over and against Tolstoy in this respect. It has been thought[5] that Dostoevski at some point had Tolstoy very much in mind as such a presumptuous type (let us not even begin to deny, in the meantime, nor did Dostoevski deny, the monumental grandeur of Tolstoy's lasting creative production; but the point needs to be made all the same, and is made again here). Romantic love, if not an end in itself, is, as I argue fulsomely in this collection, both inevitable *and designed*, and living *through* our experience of it, in the last analysis, altogether crucial to our evolution into higher consciousness.

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[4] See on this score my *Tragical Historical: Essays in Western Cultural History from Boethius to Beckett*.

[5] By George Steiner, for example, in *Tolstoy or Dostoevski*, Yale University Press, 1996, orig.pub. 1959. See p.333 bottom.

We look back on the cultural productions of the civilization in question and wonder greatly, at the same time, at the extent to which the great authors of the past gave themselves to a full method of tragic analysis of our human nature, so glaringly evident is this scope of concern in the work by Dostoevski and by Shakespeare, which I bring into focus in **Part V**. It is a measure of our imponderable indebtedness to the great authors that their analysis has been done, and that we have become the grateful beneficiaries of this work, free to build on it for ourselves towards a higher end. Those before us have labored, and we have entered into their labors, or, to adapt the words D.H. Lawrence used of such initiating spirits (speaking, though he does, out of a rather different context and with a rather different goal):

> *But it is vital that some men understand, that some few go through this final pain and relief of knowledge. For the rest* (of us), *they have only to know peace when it is given them. But for the few there is the bitter necessity to understand the death that has been,* ***so <u>we</u> may pass quite clear of it***.[6]

Shakespeare has done the work of suffering our nature in this anguished way, together with Dostoevski in later times. Likewise has Shakespeare, together with Novalis, done the further work, only incipiently traced out by Dostoevski, of finally breaking through that suffering, at last into a 'brave new world' that has now also opened out to us. (Note that I otherwise disclaim any further association with Lawrence beyond his impressive identification of a fundamental deathly aspect in our being come down to us from long ages past, and his idea of a further hopeful prospect to arise in the future achieved through a proper coming to terms with this, as alluded to in his words. Lawrence for his part elaborated a direction of cultural life into the future that was, for the most part, perversely ambivalent and finally un-progressive in its insistent *accommodation* of the darker side of us, unable, at last, to let go of it because unable to live through it tragically and so ever *break through* it, certainly in the sense that I pursue in this collection. Of great import, otherwise, is Lawrence's view of our present age as the most significant recent turning-point in such developments as have, for some time, been struggling to bring forth a whole new civilization in the next period of our history. The epigraph to this collection serves as an acknowledgment of this basic fact[7]).

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[6] From *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine*, p.34.

[7] That Lawrence did not, at the same time, adhere to any idea of a progressive evolutionary development and destiny for humanity, let alone the specific one brought forward in these pages, is confirmed by his own bold words: "I do not believe in evolution, but in the strangeness and rainbow-change of ever-renewed creative civilizations," from *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, Dover, 2005, orig. pub. 1925, p.56. I.e., new civilizations appear regularly, if over great periods of time, one after the other: as with a rainbow, in each case as a fresh synthesis of an eternal interplay between darkness and light. See "The Crown," from *Reflections*, cited above, p.261. Lawrence's stated position here runs against the whole development of the age as seen, for example, by Teilhard

That a deeper analysis of human tragedy need continue through also into our own present time, and that it do so with further bearings even on the sacred ground we are building on in our hope in the future—this is the import of the paper that is finally offered in **Part VI**, which stands somewhat apart from the rest of the papers in this collection. For here my applications turn back, from the way we can see ourselves "going ahead" into the future in the context of the more specialized activity of anthroposophical culture today, back from *that* experience to our consciousness of the tremendous impact human tragedy has had in the past, which will, if only as the big thing it has been in the past, continue to challenge us in the future. A further questioning of ourselves as to how we are moving forward also in those quarters is hereby suggested. With this paper, readers are offered a glimpse into the additional and quite new issues facing those who in anthroposophical circles carry on their work towards the future. A patient and objective reading of this paper should bring a picture of the profounder setting of this initiative into focus in a way that it is hoped will be eye-opening to those who read in this way and who are concerned with the whole scene as it is unfolding today…

In short, the focus of the following collection is on

1) how an experience of Tragic Romance bears inalienably on our further evolution into a Higher Life of Sophianic destiny,

2) what the metaphysical and psychological basis of such a destiny turns out to be, and

3) what this destiny imports of a radical confrontation with those many stubborn forms of rebellious disposition that have for centuries confounded our human nature and are likely to continue to challenge it on every hand.

At the same time, recalcitrant *social* forces on either side of the great historical divide continue, by *their* stubborn insistence on themselves, to confound and challenge the great possibilities of Sophianic development that are being made more and more available to us already today.

These forces stem, on the one hand, from a redundant mainstream civilization growing more and more spiritually and creatively effete with time, and on the other, movements in cultural renewal, including the anthroposophical, which would appear to be still much lacking in depth of historical conscience and so, could, with time, also prove creatively sterile.

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de Chardin representatively: "What makes the world in which we live specifically modern is our discovery in it and around it of evolution. What *disconcerts* the modern world is how it ever could be sure that there is an outcome—a suitable outcome—to that evolution. What should the future be like to give us the strength to accept the prospect of it and bear its weight?" *The Phenomenon of Man*, Collins, 1960, pp.229-230.

# PART I

# *Shakespeare, Novalis, and the Epistemic Challenge of Tragic Romance: A Canonical History for our Time*

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There are perhaps, in the end, as many canons of literature as there are seriously engaged readers of literature, each of whom will in their own way, and at some point, have inevitably come into some vision of how the history of literature, and indeed of human culture, unfolds. There are many such canons, but in my own life's work as a critical reader of literature and of culture, it would appear that I upheld one as the most significant of all for our time. It turns out that I have taken my own position in this respect, but this would hardly deny the intrinsic worth of many another canon that has been or will be championed or brought forward as offering other insights and inroads into the forbidding mysteries of historical succession. In the case of the canon I bring forward, a very good number of other authors are concerned, but the two that have stood out as the Jachin and Boaz among the lot are Shakespeare and Novalis.[8]

A typical pantheon of the most representative authors across the epochs will have highlighted Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, and Goethe, especially in connection with, respectively, *The Iliad*, *The Divine Comedy*, *Hamlet*, and *Faust*. To round things out in respect of range of accomplishment, one might, and perhaps should, also add to this supreme list of works, in the case of Homer *The Odyssey* and in the case of Shakespeare his three other "great tragedies," namely *Othello*, *King Lear,* and *Macbeth*. It is easy enough, in going from Homer to Dante, to see the transition from Pagan to Christian, covering the first half of human history, if you like. The second half sophisticates further, as we enter, in the case of *Hamlet*, emblematically into the idea of the Modern Consciousness, as a sphere of experience distinct from anything that comes before in human history. In time, this idea is in turn completed, as it were, by the projection of a Supernal or Higher Life hypothesized to arise out of the Modern Experience as a further possibility, most representatively, it is thought, in the case of *Faust*. However, if the other great tragedies by Shakespeare are accommodated into this picture, along with *Hamlet*, and as perhaps should be the case, then the paradigm alters and another idea emerges beyond the more narrow focus on the experience of Modern Consciousness. This is the idea of a comprehensive encounter with Tragedy in the whole depth of human nature, both atavistically and in the

[8] *Jachin*, Hebrew for "He will establish" / *Boaz*, "In him is strength." [We are returned to this characterization in 'Endnote 1'to this paper. Ed.]

present. From this point of view, Goethe's *Faust* cannot serve as an authentic case of a more complete experience in our historical continuum, for it is well known that Goethe eschewed a final encounter with Tragedy, and is indeed famously associated with the idea of "The Avoidance of Tragedy,"[9] which dispossesses him of any triumphant or additionally progressive role we might be assigning to him in that continuum.

More to the point of the history we are tracing, if we look still deeper into Shakespeare's Tragedies, is the idea of Tragic Romance. All of Shakespeare's tragic heroes, in the main tragedies we have isolated, experience Tragedy in the end especially in relation to the Death of the Beloved (Hamlet in relation to Ophelia, Othello to Desdemona, Lear to Cordelia; this will be found to be so even in the case of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth[10]). This is why when Shakespeare re-emerges after the tragedies in his later plays, the central focus is on this Death (the death of Thaisa, the death of Hermione, the death of Prospero's wife); this Death being by that point, and only at that point, at last resolved (for, by now, this is a Death that is not the Tragic End, rather the Death that leads onwards and is transformed to greater Life).[11] Romance, in our terms—which is to say, in its association with a totalizing *ideal* of love—is, in fact, a *late* development in Western culture, originating as late as the end of the 12th century (as C.S. Lewis, for one, was among the first to demonstrate conclusively some years ago[12]). Romance, in this sense, is the main idea to be associated with the second half of our historical continuum, *along with*, thanks to Shakespeare's resurrection of the matter, harking back also to the ancient world, the whole depth of human Tragedy.[13] The compound idea that emerges from this wildly unhappy coupling of spheres we have identified as Tragic Romance. Out of this most representative of ideas in this latter-day epoch of ours emerges—as we have seen, from the whole pattern in Shakespeare—the further idea of the Higher Life that comes from *it*. Such a paradigmatic account is to be distinguished from the classic picture we have cited of a Supernal Life arising out of Modern Experience, as represented in Goethe, in the two parts of his *Faust*.

In the alternative paradigmatic line we are tracing, Goethe is already upstaged by Shakespeare, who, unlike Goethe, takes himself fully through Tragedy. In the last scene of the First Part of *Faust*, Goethe comes indeed to the limits of a Modern Experience of Tragedy, but

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[9] See the essay by Eric Heller in *The Disinherited Mind*, 1957.

[10] Lady Macbeth's death, when announced to him, being spoken of by Macbeth ironically: "She should have died hereafter," but lived through bitterly, for by this point, in the context of Macbeth's horridly hopeless struggle—"in blood/Stepped in so far," as he puts it—her death strikes him as superfluous, having passed beyond the possibility of his attending to it.

[11] More on this theme below.

[12] In *The Allegory of Love*, 1936. See also Denis de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*, 1942, orig. pub. 1939.

[13] In Othello, King Lear, and Macbeth, atavistically.

in the opening Prologue to the Second Part (published some 25 years later), Tragedy is eschewed: it is treated as having been, as it were, but a bad Dream. What follows in this Second Part is the seemingly limitless account of a Supernal Life that is nothing other, and nothing less, than a grand Phantasmagoria incorporating what had become, by then, Goethe's many-minded poetic concerns and initiatives, such as he thought additionally possible to Modern Man, beyond Tragedy. In this Second Part, Modern Consciousness, in its characteristic, free detachment, has intervened to overrule the historical constraints of Tragedy, which had always imposed a form of Judgment or Limitation on human nature that it was understood would have to be reckoned with if human nature were ever really to come free and inherit any Brave New World.

Goethe's later concerns and initiatives take the form, contrarily, of a great Review of Western Civilization in both its medieval and classical components—brought to one head, in *Faust*, in the uneasy and finally unworkable association of Faust and the spirit of Helen of Troy—a Review that may be held to be itself but another Dream. Even Rudolf Steiner, who otherwise made a good deal of the significance of Goethe for our time, towards the end of his life pointed out this limitation in him:

> *He went away finally from the Spiritual Soul* [i.e., the prospective Higher Soul of our time that is locked away in Modern Consciousness] *to the Intellectual or Mind-Soul* [the Higher Soul of the classical-medieval era]*, which was gradually dying out …*[14]

To summarize the point: as Goethe embodied this, there was the possibility of a further Supernal Life for the Modern Consciousness cut out of an Imaginative Re-kindling of the classical-medieval era's deepest forays into the realms of Nature and Spirit. However, this additional Life could only be itself a Dream, as it was soon to be "dying out." [15] At the same time, this possibility, as Goethe conceives of it, builds on a categorical rejection of Tragedy that will not be easily accepted by many. By the end of Part One of *Faust*, the tragic horrors for Margaret and for Faust have accumulated, as Goethe himself fully recognized. His response to this? Pointless to imagine that any of that could be resolved, so it will be best to wash it all off and forget. This is how he puts it:

> *Considering the horrors that* [at the end of Part One] *had descended upon Gretchen and their necessarily devastating aftermath upon the whole soul of Faust,* ***I had no other recourse than*** *to*

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[14] See his "Michael Letters," no.13, in *Anthroposophical Leading Thoughts*, tr. George and Mary Adams, Rudolf Steiner Press, 1985, 129.

[15] Faust in Part Two alludes to this Life, of which he is Goethe's chief exemplar, as "an added living-space for man," and he boasts that: "I work that millions may possess this space." See the 2009 edition of *Faust Part Two* in Penguin, 258, 269.

*paralyze my hero utterly, consider him annihilated, in order then to kindle a new life out of this apparent death. I was obliged to seek the assistance of those beneficent and powerful spirits we are accustomed to think of in the form and character of elves. It is all compassion and deepest pity. There is no sitting in judgment, and no asking whether he deserves it or not as might be the case if they were human judges.*[16]

And so does Faust happily re-emerge from the horrid depths of his tragic life. He is exhorted, by this Choir of Spirits, in spite of all, to "rise ["from sleep"] to wish and will unclouded … in high resolve that banishes misgiving."[17] And so does Faust indeed have recourse, at last, to the overriding Spirit of Nature all around him: "the blend of joy and sorrow confounds us/Sends us to earth: to veil our troubled state." Looking benignly on Nature's unresisted spectacle, Faust, "heart elate," can now consider "how splendid" it is "[t]o see the rainbow rising from this rage." Such final, beneficent treatment has been thought to be the rule with all of Goethe's potentially tragic heroes:

*When the crisis is over, they are at one again with the spirit of Nature. They are not purified in a tragic sense, not raised above their guilt through atonement, but enter, as it were, a biologically, not morally, new phase of life, healed by oblivion and restored to strength through the sleep of the just.*[18]

The Just, then, are already Just and remain Just, in whatever pass they may have found themselves, and Margaret (Gretchen) may, as for her Life, simply be sacrificed to Them. Through her tragic fate, she is herself (one is never shown how) transformed and need only re-appear, in the briefest show of her beatitude at the very end of *Faust*, as the "Una Poenitentium ["One of the Penitents"] once called Gretchen." So much for her in the meantime.[19]

Goethe's rejection of Tragedy was, in fact, a betrayal of himself, for *Faust* Part One is Tragedy in the fullest sense.[20] At the end of Part One, Faust may not have died, but his tragedy is already fully accomplished. His situation compares significantly with that of Hamlet who,

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[16] Quoted by David Constantine in his "Introduction" to the 2009 edition of *Faust Part Two* in Penguin.
[17] See the Penguin *Faust* Part Two, 24-25.
[18] Eric Heller, from "Goethe and the Avoidance of Tragedy, in *The Disinherited Mind*.
[19] For more on Goethe's notable evasion of responsibility for tragedy or the encounter with guilt, see my monograph, *The New School of the Imagination: Rudolf Steiner's Mystery Plays in Literary Tradition*, 2007, 3-6, at: https://www.academia.edu/108697118/The_New_School_of_the_Imagination_Rudolf_Steiners_Mystery_Plays_in_Literary_Tradition
[20] As I have demonstrated in "Re-claiming Goethe for Tragedy: The Outstanding Case of *Faust* Part One," in *Tragical Historical: Late Essays in Western Cultural History*, 2026, at: https://www.academia.edu/146733207/Tragical_Historical_Essays_in_Western_Cultural_History_from_Boethius_to_Beckett

returned from his own voyage abroad, at the beginning of Act Five is suddenly apprized of Ophelia's death. By the end of that Act, Hamlet will be dead. Otherwise, Faust's tragic fate as a slave to Mephistopheles is already sealed in the manner of Dr. Faustus at the end of Christopher Marlowe's play. Hamlet and Faust do not face up squarely to their guilt, but that hardly means that they do not see how guilty they are: Faust displays his awareness of this more openly even than Hamlet. Shakespeare will bring his tragic hero face to face with his guilt more directly in *Othello* and in *King Lear*, and Macbeth especially stands knowingly accused, guilt overwhelming him beyond even the freedom to bewail his Beloved. In the sequel of his tragedies, and beyond in the later so-called romances, Shakespeare in respect of guilt pursues a course of action, in fact, the direct opposite of Goethe's. The burden of guilt arising from Tragedy is confronted head-on, and, as it were, brought to a head in *Pericles* and *The Winter's Tale*, where it undergoes a further transmutation through the figures of Pericles and Leontes—precisely through atonement. This further transmutation of Romance and Tragedy into what turns out to be a completely new form of Higher Life, as Shakespeare's later plays embody this, is what makes of him the first chief Exemplar of the second half of the picture of History we are pursuing here.

It is a matter for our understanding of reaching down to the actual basis of this transmutation as well as the specific form it takes in Shakespeare which is an entirely new development unique to this later epoch in History. It is a development pivotally exemplified in Shakespeare, but not until the coming of Rudolf Steiner, who worked in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, is the basis and form of this transmutation at last fully accounted for in theoretical terms. This is after the long process of the development of Romanticism had intervened further. I have explored this whole situation at some length in my books.[21] Shakespeare, in short, points to Steiner, whose account of the possibility of a successful Meeting with The Guardian of the Threshold and the Higher Powers that open up for one *from* such a Meeting—progressively greater powers of Imagination, Inspiration, and Intuition, as Steiner denominates them—at last *explains* Shakespeare's exemplary evolution through Tragedy into a new Higher Life such as we find symbolically enacted in his later plays.

Goethe turned away from the horrors into which his Faust had come. Shakespeare, contrarily, *assumes* the horrors of his heroes. We can only imagine what the creator of Hamlet,

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[21] Notably in the third section of *Othello's Sacrifice* and in *Prospero's Powers*, both re-printed in *Remembering Shakespeare*, 2016, and in *The Thinking Spirit*, 2007, a theoretical collection focused on Rudolf Steiner and Romanticism intended as a companion-piece to the foregoing. For a convenient, recent summary of my effort, see "Shakespeare's Initiation-Drama in the Light of the Romantic Evolutionary Thought of Rudolf Steiner" below.

Othello, Lear, not to mention Macbeth, was left living with in his mind. What can have been involved, to be fully experiencing Tragedy in such terms, and then somehow (after some time) to come out of it into the Higher Life symbolically enacted for us in those later plays? However did Shakespeare come through? We can begin to have some idea of what his experience involved with reference to Steiner's description of the form that a Meeting with the Guardian takes. As for this Meeting, Steiner explains that "[h]owever terrible the form assumed by the Guardian, it is only the effect of the pupil's past life… awakened into independent existence outside himself."[22] For Shakespeare, this "past life" has been, at least more recently, an accumulation of horrors in his mind, from the activity of his own imagination of the abysmal depths of human nature, as conveyed through his tragic creations. Steiner insists additionally that "[a] truly terrible, spectral being confronts the pupil, and he will need all that presence of mind and faith in the reliability of his path of knowledge which he has had ample opportunity to acquire in the course of his training." This would assume a certain "training" of the spirit in Shakespeare that, from what we sense of his genius or natural stature of mind, he could well have achieved for himself, though some exposure to contemporary Rosicrucian culture could very possibly have also been the case.[23] There is no getting around the impact such an encounter with the Guardian must have: "As a rule we cannot enter the spiritual worlds without passing through a deep upheaval in our souls … We experience a kind of inner shattering … fear … anxiety … horror … Such a person must be prepared."[24]

It is also the case, however, that an encounter with the Guardian, in the strong soul who is prepared for it, brings forth *through its own force* the Higher Self that one will, in one way or another, whether consciously or half-consciously, have in the meantime cultivated in oneself: thus "his *lower self* is before him as a mirror-image … but within this image there appears the true reality of the *higher Self*."[25] And it is just the point that this Higher Self must be actively at work in this encounter: "He has to direct and lead with his new-born self what he is in his ordinary self and which appears to him in an image."[26] This turns out not to be any easy matter at all: "A sort of battle against the *Doppelganger* will result … to establish the right relationship to this *Doppelganger* and not permit him to do anything that is not under the influence of his

[22] See *The Thinking Spirit*, op.cit., 112.
[23] Novalis also undergoes an individualized training, as I show in my book on him. See below for details. Such an individual training does not, in the case of these great spirits, preclude building on a universal process. For more on the Rosicrucian connections in Shakespeare's case, see "Prospero's Powers" in *Remembering Shakespeare*.
[24] *The Thinking Spirit*, 113.
[25] *The Thinking Spirit*, 106.
[26] *The Thinking Spirit*, 113.

new-born ego."[27] And that is what makes the experience finally "necessary"[28]: "The pupil can exclude what comes from himself only if he has first recognized the image of his own *Doppelganger*."[29] This difficulty is just what Goethe's Faust experiences when he stands face to face before the Spirit of the Earth, who assumes the terrible aspect of the Guardian: "O fearful form," Faust cries out, "I tremble, come not near." The Spirit will maintain this form throughout this scene only because Faust is unable to rise beyond it. The Spirit's judgment of Faust at this point determines all the rest of his story in Goethe's epic drama: "You match the spirit that you comprehend, not me." Unable to find himself at a higher level, Faust must be thrust back upon himself. Here one might adapt a famous formulation.[30] Faust's bafflement at the absence in his nature of a further link to the Higher Self—such as would allow him to break through the impasse with the Guardian—is but an expression of his creator's bafflement in the face of his own inability to rise to such a Self. Goethe, in short, doubted that he had it in him to do this, a gnawing thought that will stand with him right through into the Second Part of his drama, which would be made necessary in its own turn.[31]

And what of Shakespeare and *his* better fortunes with the Higher Self? The first great moment of self-revelation Shakespeare provides that concerns his emergence into the Higher Life takes the form of the wondrous reunion between Pericles and Marina, as presented in Act V, scene 2 of *Pericles*. This meeting takes place after each character has been through every adversity, at a certain point in a mirror-image of each other ("She speaks,/My lord, that may be hath endured a grief/Might equal yours, if both were justly weighed"—167). On the one hand, Pericles lies in a complete debilitated condition: he is consumed by deepest "melancholy" (177) over his loss of wife and daughter, and has been, even before this, in another deep "melancholy" (65) bearing on his experience of relentless persecution at the hands of the world's evil (both human and natural).[32] Here is a symbolic enactment (simple in outline, yet profoundly apt) of Shakespeare's deepest immersion in Tragedy up to that point, this "melancholy" invoking the depths of his entanglement in his lower or ordinary self, which has "lived" (vicariously) in subjection to Tragedy. At the time of the meeting with Marina, Pericles presents himself in a state of utter subjection: for fourteen years, from the time of the death of his wife, he has not

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[27] *The Thinking Spirit*, 113.
[28] *The Thinking Spirit*, 113n.
[29] *The Thinking Spirit*, 106.
[30] T.S. Eliot's, who was commenting on "Hamlet and his Problems."
[31] The second part of Steiner's comment above, on p.3, makes the full point, namely that Goethe "*was* able" in the meantime "to carry over an infinite amount from the Intellectual Soul into the Spiritual Soul." (Italics mine.) To what extent so is seen in the two large volumes of Steiner's lectures on *Faust* available from SteinerBooks.
[32] Page citations from the edition of *Pericles* as published in the Folger Shakespeare Library, Simon and Schuster, 2005.

cut his hair (107), and having learned of the additional death of his daughter years later, he has not washed or shaved, has put on sackcloth (141), and ceased to speak or to listen, eating only as much as is necessary "to prorogue his grief" (163). His condition is at once an embodiment of guilt, a form of protest, and a mode of atonement. Steiner has delineated the form that the initiation-experience takes at this stage: "his *lower self* is before him as a mirror-image." This is the sphere of the untransformed Imagination, which, as Imagination, is nevertheless already progress in spiritual evolution. And then, "within this image there appears the true reality of the *higher Self*," what I have elsewhere described as "a first effect of Inspiration working through the world of Imagination."[33] Marina is this Higher Self, which has always been there *in potentia*, and has likewise suffered calamity ("a grief equal yours"), but has remained aloof from it all ("a stranger"—169), and is now called forth. She is no less of noble descent than the concrete human being who has suffered: having a "derivation equivalent"—167, but She appears, contrary to this being in subjection, "Like Patience smiling … extremity out of act"—171), and is otherwise "a Palace/For the crowned Truth to dwell in"—169. It is now for this human being to respond and to come forth in relation to its Higher nature, for it is Pericles's purpose now "to direct and lead with his new-born self what he is in his ordinary self."[34]

An extraordinary species of atonement underlies the whole event, and for Shakespeare, who is the one atoning, it has been ongoing. *Pericles* is the atonement-process operating at one level, in respect of the self's fundamental innocence, for Pericles is never literally guilty of the adverse events that are mounted against him. And yet he is, universally speaking, *held* guilty, in the sense, for example, in which we are all said to have been guilty of an "original sin," at the time of the Fall. Thus Pericles suspects himself guilty: "mine, if I may call it, offence" (27); "doubting lest he had erred or sinned" (31). He happens only to have stumbled upon knowledge of Antiochus's incest with his daughter, and this stumbling upon it has made him guilty. And yet, he is not, of course, otherwise directly guilty of anything himself.[35] This is one way in which we are, as it were, both innocent, and yet guilty, of Tragedy when it befalls us. To the extent that it befalls Shakespeare's tragic heroes, even they are in some measure innocent (they are far from being pure villains), and it is this dimension of innocence (of being innocent, if yet still universally guilty) that is addressed in the development of events that concern Pericles. Leontes in *The Winter's Tale* dramatizes the atonement-process at a level complementary to that in *Pericles*, inasmuch as the hero of the *Tale* is overwhelmingly guilty and nothing but, this being

[33] *The Thinking Spirit*, 106n.

[34] See *Remembering Shakespeare*, 138 for more on the symbolism of this scene.

[35] If Pericles can be said to be personally guilty of anything, it is what one might describe as "wanting out of order," in seeking the hand of Antiochus's daughter in the first place, even if without knowing what has transpired between daughter and father. In that episode, Pericles is lost to appearances.

the other dimension to the experience of Shakespeare's tragic heroes. Shakespeare has, as it were, separated out the whole experience of his heroes in order to have us see better how the further evolutionary development unfolds. For it is only by virtue of what remains innocent in us that the Higher Self in us can be engaged at all, and, even so, then follows a still greater and harder form of confrontation with oneself, in respect of the deep problem of one's guilt, and in Shakespeare who is bearing that guilt with us.

The process of atonement in which Leontes is engaged is altogether straightforward, profound, and also comprehensive. In the play's terms it has proceeded for 16 years, and even when at this time it is brought up that he has done more than enough penance ("No fault could you make/Which you have not redeemed—indeed, paid down/More penitence than done trespass"—195), he himself knows better than to think this can be true ("Whilst I remember/Her and her virtues, I cannot forget/My blemishes in them"[36]). Here is, once again, an image of the lower, downtrodden, guilty self unable by itself to bring about its redemption, though, in its seeking in the meantime to atone, it opens itself to that possibility. Far more challenging to our understanding in our experience of this play is the role assigned to Perdita, who as the figure of the daughter who was once brought to the brink of death and yet survived, herself embodies the Higher Self, which in the meantime has come through, invoked by the atonement, and come forth at last to bring the process of redemption into being.

Greater possibilities emerge in the Higher Self at this stage that are linked to a Power embodied in Time who literally appears as the Presenter of the play's developments at this point, at the beginning of Act IV (just after the last of the play's tragic misdeeds have taken place). It is a Power that operates through the order of Nature and indeed in every moment of time, and with which the Higher Self is further linked, a Power that it is now Perdita's role to mediate.[37] At this stage in the evolution of the Self, the process of Imagination has extended itself further to a point inside "great creating Nature" (139) where a progressive Inspirational order is now revealed within which a higher life is constantly being re-created out of death:

*What you do*
*Still betters what is done. When you speak, sweet,*
*I'd have you do it ever. When you sing,*
*I'd have you buy and sell so, so give alms,*
*Pray so; and for the ord'ring your affairs,*

[36] All quotations from the edition of *The Winter's Tale* as published in the Folger Shakespeare Library, Simon and Schuster, 2009.

[37]This Power would appear to be based in Christ Himself: Says Time: "Let me pass/The same I am ere ancient'st order was" (119). Cf. KJV John 8, 58: "Before Abraham was I am"…

*To sing them too. When you do dance, I wish you*
*A wave o' the' sea, that you might ever do*
*Nothing but that, move still, still so,*
*And own no other function. Each your doing,*
*So singular in every particular,*
*Crowns what you are doing in the present deeds,*
*That all your acts are queens.* (143)

In Steiner's account of the sphere of Inspiration,[38] such "acts," or "actions," follow as a consequence of being now inwardly able to "read" from an occult "script" that is, in fact, "heard," and through which the Higher Powers who govern this world communicate their evolutionary purposes …

[Ed. Text left unfinished; more on these themes below.

[For the draft of an account of how Novalis fits into the evolutionary picture as the author was developing this in the above essay where the focus has been exclusively on Shakespeare**,** **see Endnote 1** below, p.16: "On Novalis in the Comparison with Shakespeare."

## [The Author's Canonical Line: From Shakespeare to Rilke

[From this point the Reader can go on to John O'Meara's books where a full exposition of these themes continues:

first, to *Remembering Shakespeare*, pp.142-144 and 155-178.

thence, to *The Thinking Spirit: Rudolf Steiner and Romantic Theory, A Collection of Texts with Notes*, beginning with Chapter 7 ("The Critique of Goethe") and proceeding from there right through Chapter 9 ("Knowledge of the Higher Worlds.") Authors included in this canon: **Goethe, Novalis, Coleridge, Emerson**.

**For the link between Steiner and Shakespeare, also presented in *The Thinking Spirit***, see by way of introduction, "Shakespeare's Initiation-Drama in the Light of the Romantic Evolutionary Thought of Rudolf Steiner" (also given below—Ed.) at

https://www.academia.edu/144573909/Shakespeares_Initiation_Drama_in_the_Light_of_the_Romantic_Evolutionary_Thought_of_Rudolf_Steiner

thence, to *The New School of the Imagination: Rudolf Steiner's Mystery Plays in Literary Tradition*. Authors in this canon: **Wordsworth, Coleridge, T.S. Eliot**,

[38] See *The Thinking Spirit*, 114-115.

then, to *On Nature and the Goddess in Romantic and post-Romantic Literature*. Authors: **Robert Graves, Ted Hughes, (Shakespeare), Keats**, **Wordsworth**,

thence to **Novalis**, *The Way of Novalis*[39]

then to **Rilke,** *Rilke in the Making*: *A Comprehensive Study of His Life and Work* …

***** [All material (except for *The Thinking Spirit*) now available for downloading at https://independent.academia.edu/JohnOMeara5 ][40]

## [From the Author's Notes on His Canonical Line

[In the end, in this Succession, Shakespeare points to Rudolf Steiner; Novalis points to Robert Powell, as indicated in the section on "Novalis and his Successor," from my website, at http://johnomeara.squarespace.com/riddle (see details to the Novalis/Powell association in the second half of that page). [See, also, **Endnote 2** in the present document—Ed.]

The historical development in going from Shakespeare to Novalis may be described as a *further* evolution, from "a direction towards" to a "coming in of" a New Age in a first stage that receives still more definitive expression in our time in the work of Steiner and Powell, among others.

To put it still more pointedly, both of my authors belong to the Sophianic-anthroposophical stream that comes to expression in our time (i.e., they point, among other things in this stream, to the further association of Steiner and Powell in our time).

[In the meantime, Shakespeare "eclipses" Graves and Hughes in the sphere of engagement with the Goddess, and Novalis "eclipses" Wordsworth and Keats in the sphere of Romantic Imagination.[41]

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[39] A close account of Novalis's ill-fated love and tragic life and the elaborate process of self-work by which, through his experience of tragedy, he made himself at last worthy of the vision of "a New History, a New Humanity."

[40] As for obtaining *The Thinking Spirit*, see http://johnomeara.squarespace.com/the-author-in-a-second-stage

[41] [Ed. As a climactic demonstration of Novalis's more far-reaching powers of Imagination relative to Wordsworth and to Keats, see the chapter "Coming into the Visionary Life" in *The Way of Novalis*, HcP Ottawa, 2014. What Wordsworth laments he can no longer fully live (back) into, Novalis does live (back) into: we are asked to consider, in this respect, Novalis's greater success with a common perception of the "sea" and "sun" of that otherworld (see p.123). Wordsworth's limitations are brought forth fully in O'Meara's monograph on Wordsworth, This *Life, This Death: Wordsworth's Poetic Destiny*. Keats's limitations are demonstrated in O'Meara's *Myth, Depravity, Impasse*, Keats representing the aspect of "impasse" in this study, Graves and Hughes the aspect of "myth," Shakespeare the additional, confounding consideration of "depravity" that further

Both Shakespeare and Novalis have a deeper understanding, than do these other historically eminent authors, of the all-deciding dynamic between Tragic Romance and the Higher Life (for more on this dynamic, see below **Endnote 3**).

[Rilke, for his part, harks back to the inspiration of Novalis, but in a relation of creative misprision that is forced upon him, seeing as he cannot give up the Dead Beloved (the Lou Salome of his early Florentine days): the result is the sublime anguish, creative of another, ambiguous form of transcendence, of the modern, tragic Orphic Poet.

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[Some Basic Concordances: Shakespeare, Steiner, Novalis, Robert Powell

| **II** | **I** | **III** |
|---|---|---|
| | **Shakespeare** | |
| *The Winter's Tale* | *Pericles* | *The Tempest* |
| Perdita-Leontes | Pericles-Marina | Prospero-Miranda |
| | **Rudolf Steiner** | |
| | (*The Thinking Spirit*[42]) | |
| Inspiration | Imagination | Intuition |
| (Acts/Actions) | (Self-ennoblement)[43] | (Service to humanity) |
| *The Search for The New Isis, Divine Sophia* | [44]*Knowledge of the Higher Worlds and its Attainment* | *The Reappearance of Christ in the Etheric* [45] |

challenges an identification with mythic Imagination that is judged to be, in the end, too easily championed by Graves and Hughes. Neither Wordsworth nor Keats are otherwise at all belittled in this comparison, who are presented as being, in the profound reaches of their respective powers of Imagination, certainly "on the way," each in his own guise.]

[42] For the link between Shakespeare and Steiner, see also the last sections of "Shakespeare's Initiation-Drama in the Light of the Romantic Evolutionary Thought of Rudolf Steiner," given below.

[43] All three terms in this line draw on Steiner's own language, as cited in *The Thinking Spirit*, 113-116.

[44] The three titles in this line constituting seminal pronouncements by Rudolf Steiner, among many others. See the Rudolf Steiner Archive (https://rsarchive.org/) under books and lectures.

[45] With reference to Steiner, see also by Sergei O. Prokofieff (grandson to the composer, and a leading expositor in our time of Steiner's extensive work). *The Heavenly Sophia and the Being Anthroposophia* (a close study of Rudolf Steiner that I comment on in my memoir sequel *The Bereaved Writer*, 2017—see 51-54):

| **II** | **I** | **III** |
|---|---|---|
| Resurrection of the Sophia | Quest for the Sophia and the Meeting with Anthroposophia | Communion with the Living Christ (in the etheric) |

**cont'd/p.13 notes**

| II | I | III |
|---|---|---|
| | **Novalis** | |
| *Hymns to the Night* (Sophie in the company of the Mother—Sophia) | Philosophical Writings, Letters, and Diaries[46] | *Christendom, or Europe* (inspiration by the 'Brother' who serves the Sophia[47]) |
| Penetrating the Cosmos | Penetrating Nature (the Eucharistic Embrace) | A New History, a New Humanity |
| | **Robert Powell** | |
| Astrosophy, or the New Star-Wisdom[48] | [49]*Cultivating Inner Radiance and the Body of Immortality* | The Sophia Grail Circle[50] |

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| II | I | III |
|---|---|---|
| | **cf. Shakespeare** | |
| Hermione | Pericles-Marina | Prospero* |
| *The Winter's Tale* | *Pericles* | *The Tempest* |

(* For Prospero's association with a higher Intuitional "service to humanity" and the Damascean (Christ-inspired) experience that is linked to this, all of which is Shakespeare's own experience since the play's action is but an allegory of *his* evolution in consciousness, see my account in *Remembering Shakespeare*, pp.161-176 (for the Damascean experience, see p.173).

[46] See *The Way of Novalis,* 28ff, for an extensive study of these writings and the elaborate program of self-work they expand on towards one goal: to meet up with Sophie again in death!

[47] See p.14 below.

[48] For the background to such Star Wisdom, see, by Robert Powell, *Hermetic Astrology I*. Lay readers would do well to begin by looking at p.44 bottom through p.49, where the *foundation* of such Star-Wisdom is described, namely *the birth of Christ in the soul* as mediated by the Sophia (cf. Raphael's *Sistine Madonna*). See especially today the work of Julie Humphreys at https://steiner.presswarehouse.com/browse/author/2dfa080c-3b9c-4df7-8c0c-c13443f68238/Humphreys-Julie?page=1 Such Star-wisdom has been further applied in the form of the Choreocosmos, or Cosmic Dance, which Powell has developed in great depth over years. See again https://sophiafoundation.org/portfolio/

[49] Available from Steiner Books:
https://steinerbooks.presswarehouse.com/browse/book/9781584201175/Cultivating-Inner-Radiance-and-the-Body-of-Immortality

[50] I have fixed on this feature of Powell's work as representative of a wide-ranging cultural initiative, see https://sophiafoundation.org/portfolio/sophia-grail-circle-liturgy-ritual/ Also,
https://sophiafoundation.org/portfolio/grail-knights-training/
and https://sophiafoundation.org/portfolio/grail-facilitator-training/
For the *complete* range of activities associated with the Sophia Foundation, embodying the three terms of this line (**I,II,III**) see https://sophiafoundation.org/portfolio/

*See, also, *Elijah Come Again* (Powell's big book on Novalis)*

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Readers may continue with the structural narrative of these "concordances" by going on from here to Chapter 1 of *The Riddle of the Sophia*, as cited below, where the categories are developed in the form of **I** Thought/ **II** Feeling/ and **III** Will.

Deepening our understanding Sophiologically and Christically, the categories extend also to **I** The Holy Soul (the Shekinah)/ **II** Divine or Heavenly Sophia/ and **III** The Divine Mother (Mother Earth), with whom, in Her etheric sphere, Christ is united in His resurrection-body. For more along these lines, see *The Riddle of the Sophia*, as cited below, from Chapter 3, p.37 through Chapters 4,5, and 8.

[From a Note to a Friend:
On Novalis, the Sophia, Shakespeare, and Steiner

Needless to say, I do not in my book on Novalis proceed to a *direct* proof or demonstration of his link to the Sophianic-anthroposophical stream.

That line of demonstration comes from Robert Powell in his monumental book on Novalis, and also in his review of my Novalis book (see https://sophiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/starlight%202014%20easter_final_s.pdf pp.58-64 ).

A direct demonstration is also to be found in Steiner's many esoteric pronouncements about Novalis. See https://rsarchive.org/Search.php

In the meantime, I do link Novalis to the anthroposophical method in Chapter 1 of *The Riddle of the Sophia*: see http://johnomeara.squarespace.com/riddle

I have also offered an exceptional description by Novalis that would appear to link his experience at that time directly to the work of Robert Powell today. See my write-up on Powell that appears at http://johnomeara.squarespace.com/riddle (scroll down to the middle of this page):

> *He has made a new veil for the Holy Virgin …whose folds are the letters of her sweet Annunciation, the infinite play of the folds … a music of numbers… her singing … the ceremonial call to a new foundation gathering…* (from *Christendom, or Europe*)

This write-up is brought forward in the context of my article on "The Figure of Novalis's 'Brother' in *Christendom or Europe*" that is also cited on this page. In the revelatory, pioneering work and mission of Robert Powell in our time, something of this Brother's influence is also being conveyed [more on this below in Part II of this collection and in Endnote 2—Ed.]

What I do in my full-length study on Novalis is to trace closely the long line of experience and self-work that, over years, leads him at last to his otherworldly vision of the Mother in his *Hymns to the Night*, which vision has definite affinities with the Sophianic stream of experience, as becomes clear from some exposure to that stream (especially the work of Powell in our time). The process of self-work in Novalis also has definite affinities with the anthroposophical method of self-development as set down by Steiner in our time. A distinct parallel can be traced between Novalis's initiation-path and the terms of procedure in this sphere as elaborated by Steiner (see, for example, *The Thinking Spirit*, 82-83, including n.7 and n.8, through to 87, with which compare my account of Novalis in *The Way of Novalis*, 97-98; also *TS,* 105 through 108 and *The Way*, 119.[51]

I suppose one could say the same about my work on Shakespeare: that I never proceed to a *direct* proof or demonstration of his link to the Sophianic-anthroposophical stream, except that in his case I explicitly, and at length, bring Steiner into my discussion, in *Remembering Shakespeare* as well as via *The Thinking Spirit*. [In connection with this latter case, see below: "Shakespeare's Initiation-Drama in the Light of the Romantic Evolutionary Thought of Rudolf Steiner"—Ed.]

My argument in the case of both of my authors, as for their participation in the Sophianic-anthroposophical stream, is on the basis of analogy and an affinitive concurrence of terms…

All of my books are intended primarily as close literary-critical studies, and in the meantime I have had a longstanding and direct experience of the culture that is associated with the Sophianic-anthroposophical stream, which is what allows me to draw on, and link myself to, some major authors from that stream, in association with my work as a critic.

In the meantime, I never do leave off from the literary-critical method in my books, which always comes first since, as a writer, I see myself primarily as a literary critic.

This is so even in the case of *The Riddle of the Sophia*. I approach the published life-work of the authors treated there primarily as a critical reader, one who is, at the same time, familiar with the world of thought and experience out of which they write…

[51] [Ed. We compare in this latter juxtaposition of pages the otherworldly "tones" that, from his own experience, Steiner tells us read like "the letters of an alphabet" and Novalis's "music of numbers," which is also heard or read from an occult script written into his experience of the Sophia Mother's "singing."]

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[Endnote 1

[On Novalis in the Comparison with Shakespeare

I have spoken of Shakespeare and Novalis as, respectively, the "Jachin" and "Boaz" of the literary canon that I have highlighted in this paper: literally "He will establish" and "in Him is strength." Shakespeare's pre-eminence consists in having taken upon himself the full atavistic residue of tragic passion such as humankind had inherited up to that point in its historical progression. All this he takes upon himself vicariously with the intention of offering a "basis" for supposing that all can yet be overcome in a further evolution of suffering consciousness. By the time we reach Novalis, some two hundred years later, in him we find, as it were, a new "strength" such as will allow him to penetrate the higher worlds in an access of straightforward, immediate, and durable visionary power, of which we have no *biographical* record at least in Shakespeare's own case. That is not to say that Shakespeare would not have experienced his own form of visionary power, and it is always possible that this would have been for him, personally, also of a durable sort like that of which Novalis's life gives immediate evidence. We cannot know, but it looks more like Shakespeare's experience was rather of the "rudiments" of such vision, which I have traced to a process of development in higher states of consciousness, later denominated (by Steiner) as "imagination," "inspiration," and "intuition." Still, such states of consciousness, as Shakespeare would have experienced these, were not, as a rudimentary phenomenon, any less creative of a developing higher destiny for humankind already at that time, if not so fully a self-conscious experience for Shakespeare as it would be for Novalis in his time, not to mention also in our own time.[52]

The message we finally derive from Shakespeare was that humankind *can* overcome the worst in its own nature. In this picture, Shakespeare's specific mission (and it was big one) consisted in "clearing a path," as it were, out of the confounding atavistic inheritance, on which Novalis could then appear to make it believable that the process of visionary human destiny could indeed be moving further along, for in him *was* the "strength" to show what is finally, really and truly, possible, beyond Tragedy and beyond Romance: the adopted name, Novalis, literally denotes the inheritance of a "clearing". In Novalis, it would appear that passion is indeed endured "only" inasmuch as there is the suffering *of* the Beloved in her death, as well as the

[52] For more on an essential difference between Shakespeare's experience and Novalis's, see (once again) *The Thinking Spirit*, p.113 n.31 and p.114 n.32.

suffering inflicted on Novalis by her death, which was, all together, horrible enough. But even in the case of Novalis, one can speak of a sense of his share of guilt in this death. Novalis himself suspects this. In a letter to a friend, he raises the issue of the effect his love of Sophie would have had on her, who would appear to have thought it smacking a little too much of passion, and whether this might not at some level have contributed to her death. This effect is viewed as an indication of a height of "good"-ness in her to which he did not measure up, even if he otherwise has nothing to blame himself for as for suspect passion:

> *Don't you think, too, that she was too good for me? O! And am I not the distant cause of her death; on this I do not yet reproach myself. About my love, I need not blush—now she knows better, how heartfelt and peerless was my love for her…*[53]

She knows better "now" in death, but did not know this "then" when she was alive. In a written sketch he made of her during her illness, he noted: "My love often oppresses her," a remark that is immediately followed by: "She is *cold* through and through,"[54] as if (in part at least) he were registering here an effect that his love had on her by its importunacy. In a letter to another friend, he acknowledges that he was indeed far too attached to an earthly life with Sophie, and that it will be especially difficult for him to live without her on account of this:

> *I previously lived in the present and in the hope of earthly happiness … It will be very hard for me to completely separate myself from this world that I have studied with so much love; the renunciation will lead to many frightful moments…*[55]

And to another friend he laments:

> *I loved the earth so much.* [56]

He describes how "her first attack of horrible anxieties" in the face of death was linked to him: "Just beforehand she scolded me, because my heart could not contain itself and had to weep."[57]

Sophie's death had, of course, a physical cause; it was brought on by a defective liver, but Novalis's thought is that on a spiritual level, at some depth, the importunacy in his love, such as it was, would have somehow predisposed her to illness, the consequence of an attachment in him that was somewhat too "earthly" for her "heavenly" nature (to simplify this distinction), and that her being had been corrupted by the "imperfect" form his love took. He

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[53] See *The Birth of Novalis: Friedrich von Hardenberg's Journal of 1797, with Selected Letters and Documents*, tr. and ed., Bruce Donehower, State University of New York Press, 2007, 70
[54] *Ibid.*, 62
[55] *Ibid.*, 74
[56] *Ibid.*, 73
[57] *Ibid.*, 68

had in this highly qualified sense contributed to her death as well as to her anxiety in the face of it, and, by his love, had worsened her suffering.[58] In comparison with all that Shakespeare had borne in his imagination of the full horrible depths of human perversity, one can say that in Novalis's case it was a matter "only" of what was left of confounding passion in human nature. There would have been at least that much of guiltiness in his experience. But in any case, there was despair enough. There had been a tremendous amount of suffering in the situation they had known together; it was a terrible illness that Sophie supported (exacerbated by a long series of ineffective surgical interventions.) Novalis left us a graphic account of the horror of this scene, to which in the end he found it impossible to bear immediate witness; the contradiction between levels was too great to support:

> *It was beyond my strength to witness helplessly the horrid struggles of a blossoming young life laid so low, the appalling anxieties of that heavenly being … For that reason I summoned up the courage to go away on Friday morning—I could not possibly bear to be present at the terrible scenes that I foresaw were soon to pass … I will eternally feel the torment of her suffering.*[59]

Needless to say, after such tragedy, there would have to be a proportionately extraordinary effort of self-work and self-transformation before any full reunion with Sophie would be possible. Novalis's despair extends to an understanding of the very great distance he would now have to go to be with her again where she now was, and to make himself worthy of being with her there. That he would finally come through in this purpose is our measure of an imaginative strength in him that would have been historically unique. One may even trace the moment in which Novalis finally has his momentous breakthrough. This is many months later in the so-called *General Draft* he had been devoting himself to, in which, among other things, he was working out the whole import of his Tragic-Romantic experience, which he could sense had predisposed him to/had made him worthy of a beginning in outlining what all future human activity would look like in relation to that experience. The moment of breakthrough bears comparison with the great reconciliation of terms, of the lower nature with the higher, that we have traced in the situation between Pericles and Marina, while pointing to far more to come of visionary journeying from there, such as we also find reflected in Shakespeare's late plays. Novalis had come, at last, to a full understanding, as I put it in my book, that, "morally-speaking the 'perfect' can only be grasped in a necessary relation to the 'imperfect'," and, as he puts it, that "everything … expresses a whole related world."

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[58] Sophie did not become ill until some months after his courtship of her and their subsequent engagement.
[59] *Ibid.*, 67-69

Here is another form of representation of the lower, downtrodden, guilty self unable by itself to bring about its redemption, though, in its seeking in the meantime to atone, it opens itself to that possibility. The imperfection, the guilt, is experienced in all sincerity. And then, as Steiner puts it, "within this image there appears the true reality of the *higher Self*—for one to direct and lead, with this new-born self, what he is in his ordinary self":

> *…the master sees the work that is ostensibly his separated from himself by a gulf of thought—whose breadth he can scarcely grasp—and which only the power of the imagination can cross…*

So Novalis. A first effect of Inspiration follows from this seminal act of Imagination. Novalis paints the effect in the *Draft* as follows:

> *That is why* [or how] *the veil of the eternal virgin floats around perfection of every kind—which the lightest touch dissolves in magic fragrance, which becomes the cloud-carriage of the prophet.*[60]

And, as he will narrate the unfolding event as it finally comes upon him in all its fullness, in *Hymns to the Night*:

> *Away fled the glory of the world, and with it my mourning; the sadness flowed together into a new, unfathomable world …* [T]*he region gently upheaved itself; over it hovered my unbound, newborn spirit. The mound became a cloud of dust, and through the cloud I saw the glorified face of my beloved. In her eyes eternity reposed. I laid hold of her hands, and the tears became a sparkling bond that could not be broken. Into the distance swept by, like a tempest, thousands of years…* [61]

Possibilities emerge through the creative reach of the Higher Self that are now linked to a Power that operates inside "great creating Nature," as around the figure of Perdita in *The Winter's Tale*, where a progressive Inspirational order is now revealed that finally presents the Sophia Mother to him:

> *Glory to the queen of the world, to the great prophet of the holier worlds, to the guardian of blissful love!* ***She*** *sends you to me, thou tenderly beloved, the gracious sun of the Night…*
>
> *I see a grave face … that inclines towards me … and reveals the youthful loveliness of the Mother…*

We see indeed how at the centre of Novalis's extraordinary achievement lies the co-opted will of the Sophia Herself with Whom by now his beloved Sophie had become united: the parallel point of development in Shakespeare, who is experiencing this in his own way in

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[60] See *Philosophical Writings*, tr., and ed., Maragaret Mahony Stoljar, State University of New York Press, 1997, 133.

[61] See *Hymns to the Night*, tr. George MacDonald, Crescent Moon Publishing, Kent, UK 2010, 37-40.

historically earlier circumstances, coincides with his presentation of Perdita (re-)uniting with Hermione.[62]

And in *Christendom*, which Novalis goes on to write in this same period, we have an extensive account of all the cultural possibilities that he saw could now follow from the visionary experience into which he had come, further possibilities that are grounded in the discovery of "a new history and a new humanity" in the making. This has its parallel, *mutatis mutandis*, in Shakespeare's own presentation in *The Tempest*, for all of *its* awareness of the many ironies that will continue to attach to this prospect, relative to the condition of human nature as it continues to be at present, but for which the prospect of reform had opened, in both of these authors, as never before…[63]

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For a further view of Novalis's full progression in vision (as invoked here and outlined in the Concordances above, p.13) see

https://www.academia.edu/108697658/Novalis_on_Nature_the_Eucharistic_Embrace_and_a_New_Humanity_with_a_Further_Note_on_Novaliss_Brother_in_Christendom_or_Europe_

For a comprehensive treatment of the subject, see Chapter 9, "Coming into the Visionary Life," in my full-length book on Novalis: *The Way of Novalis*, at:

https://www.academia.edu/38022374/The_Way_of_Novalis_An_Exposition_on_the_Process_of_his_Achievement

[62] [Ed. See again footnote 45, above, as well as Novalis's relationship to the content of this note on p.13. Involved at this stage of the initiation-process, in both Shakespeare's case and Novalis's, are moral "acts" or "actions" made possible by reading from an otherworldly, occult script that is mediated by the Sophia Mother. See n.51 above, and p.10 top]

[63] For more on Prospero's experience of this prospect in his own terms, see my *Remembering Shakespeare*, 172-175. For more on the later phase of Novalis's unfolding vision, see *The Way of Novalis*, 117ff. Novalis's *Christendom* can be found in *Philosophical Writings*, tr., and ed., Maragaret Mahony Stoljar, cited in n.60. [Ed. In this way has an altogether new, creative, universal power emerged, after penetration of the otherworldly powers, out of humankind's own, higher identity in this experience. Thus Steiner, in *The Thinking Spirit*, 115: "everything is left in his own hands"; "he must find his way…from out of himself."]

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[Endnote 2

[On Robert Powell
as a Successor to Novalis in Our Time

He has claimed that there are, in fact, three great spiritual teachers in our time: Rudolf Steiner, Valentin Tomberg, as well as the re-incarnated Novalis who Steiner predicted would appear, by way of bolstering the Anthroposophical Movement, towards the end of the twentieth century. Robert Powell professes to be channelling the influences of this Novalis-figure in mediating also the work of Rudolf Steiner and Valentin Tomberg (Powell having become the legal executor of Tomberg's work).[64] An instance of this threefold association of influence is to be found in the case of the Foundation Stone Meditation, Steiner's principal bequest to the Anthroposophical Society. Valentin Tomberg gave some of his own most important lectures on the Foundation Stone Meditation, and Robert Powell has extended this line of influence by setting this Meditation to the Sacred Dance of Eurythmy.[1] Novalis's influence today, according to Powell, is principally *in the religious-artistic sphere*. Another instance of the threefold line of influence is represented in the "Prayer Sequence" that is meant to be practised every day. This brings meditations given by Steiner and by Tomberg, along with the traditional prayers of the "Our Father" and the "Hail Mary," into an artistic sequence of sacred dance that incorporates direct addresses to the Holy Trinosophia [about which more below] alongside those to the traditional Trinity (as, e.g., in the "Glory Be"). [2] This Prayer Sequence, for anyone who has truly experienced it in the context of the many diverse activities of the Sophia Community generally, constitutes one of the most significant meditational practices of our time.

[1] Eurythmy : a spiritual dance practice based on Rudolf Steiner's spiritual science and created by him under the direct inspiration of Christian Rosenkreutz.

[2] All the stated material can be ordered on-line through the Sophia Foundation of North America website.

[64] There is the *Meditations on the Tarot* by Anonymous, who was otherwise exoterically known to have been Valentin Tomberg, but much other material some of which can only be obtained through the auspices of the Sophia Foundation of North America.

*

Powell's work generally bears the imprint of the inspiration of the Novalis-Individuality in our time; still more specifically it shows the direct influence of Novalis's 'Brother'—as I present this in my **"Note on Novalis's 'Brother"** below (on p.52). In *Hymns to the Night*, in *Spiritual Songs*, and in *Christendom*, Novalis speaks of a "brother," a "friend," and a "singer," an "angelic herald," all of whom turn out to be one and the same (see *The Way of Novalis*, 117-120). This 'brother,' as I show in my "Note", is none other than the Spirit of Exoteric Christianity who lies behind Novalis's inspiration insofar as this bears on the unfolding of the further implications of Novalis's visions for the development of a full religious-artistic practice for the new age that has arrived. The following passage from Novalis's *Christendom* indicates most clearly the influence of this reigning Spirit who has been active ever since the appearance of Christ, and who re-appeared to Novalis in his time. This Spirit's message: a fresh cultivation of the Sophia's ascending power of presence in our lives, which is now to be further associated with a new scientifically-based, religious-artistic culture:

> ***He has made a new veil for the Holy Virgin …whose folds are the letters of her sweet Annunciation, the infinite play of the folds … a music of numbers… her singing … the ceremonial call to a new foundation gathering…***
>
> (Novalis, from *Christendom, or Europe*)

That is the message that has been taken up once again by Robert Powell in our own time. It is a message associated with the positive re-creation, as supported by a renewed creative expression of the Divine Sophia in this later age, of what Novalis describes as "a truly Catholic Christianity," by which he meant, very strictly, "what Christianity had made of itself (under the influence of the angelic herald who first appears at this point) in the centuries immediately after Christ before the Catholic Church began to corrupt its message," in other words, that "original time when the Christian religion unified all of Europe until the Catholic Church succumbed to its excesses"—"*those* truly Catholic or truly Christian times" (*The Way of Novalis*, 119-120).

This Spirit of Exoteric Christianity is also its own gateway in time to a full esoteric experience of the initiation mysteries. It is at once the paradox and the strength of Novalis's world-vision that his philosophically determined "science of the whole" should, in the end, open up an experience of the mysteries for everyone. One way of recognizing the *exoteric* stream in Christian spiritual practice is precisely in the concept of accessibility for all (along the lines of Novalis's notion of "the general Christian communion," as expressed in *Christendom, or Europe*). Forms of practice are offered in which everyone of good will may immediately participate. In this way the door is opened for all to enter the mysteries. Then, more and more what we find

within are the *esoteric* grounds of the practice—as mediated in this case by Robert Powell under the direct guidance of Rudolf Steiner, Valentin Tomberg, and the Novalis-Individuality in her incarnation at this time. For as Powell puts it in *The Most Holy Trinosophia and the New Revelations of the Divine Feminine*: "In reality, there is only one Christianity, embracing all those who believe in and love Jesus Christ, extending from the simplest pious peasant to the spiritual masters encircling the Christ [i.e., the Bodhisattvas]," in all of which active engagement the crucial point is the commitment, on every hand, to "an increasing consciousness of the Christian *mysteries*" (p.130).

*

In all of which regard, Powell's inspired contributions to a new understanding of the celebration of the Eucharist and Christian liturgy generally, with their profoundly informed interweaving of exoteric *and* esoteric elements, constitute what may be seen as the ***middle*** sphere of his life's work (corresponding to phase **III** in the Concordances section above). In this middle sphere, the sphere of the so-called 'Sophia Grail Circle,' belongs also Powell's mediation of those forms of eurythmic practice that are designed to help 'Cultivate Inner Radiance' and to build up the 'Body of Immortality' (corresponding to phase **I** in the Concordances section above)—see the select Bibliography below.

Still other dimensions of Powell's prodigious work bear the imprint of Novalis's inspiration: in an ***upper*** sphere (corresponding to phase **II**),in the form of the highly developed 'Star-Wisdom' he has elaborated, with its link back to what Novalis intimates about an experience in this sphere in his *Hymns to the Night*, as cited by Powell in his big book on the Novalis-Individuality (alluded to above in the "Concordances"), *Elijah Come Again,* p.185: "The star world now is flowing,/As living, golden wine,/Its joys on us bestowing, /Ourselves as stars will shine."

Finally there has also been work in the ***lower*** sphere, looking still farther beyond where we are today, in the form of 'The Shambhala Path' (to the Earth's center) most recently elaborated, which has appeared as a further extension of the direction Novalis was taking in the last part of his unfinished life: "the mystery that led Novalis into the depths of the Earth as a mining inspector in the region of Thuringia," (*Elijah Come Again*, 192). Powell's foundational work on the Path is available from The Sophia Foundation of North America, as a video presentation at https://sophiafoundation.org/product/the-shambhala-path/

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Among many other publications by Robert Powell, the reader may wish to begin by consulting the following as foundational resources,

**1)** *The Most Holy Trinosophia and the New Revelations of the Divine Feminine* (2000) (containing Powell's foundational presentation on the Sophia in her *three* aspects as the Heavenly Sophia, the Divine Mother, and the Holy Soul, and on the pivotal role in Her new ascension in our time of the three teachers, Steiner, Tomberg, and the re-incarnated Novalis. The further link between the Sophia and the Holy Virgin Mary is also elaborated in this book.) See also, representatively, Powell's article on "Stages of the Incarnation of Sophia Leading to the Rose of the World," at https://sophiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Starlight-Easter-2020-issue-99p.pdf

**2)** *Cultivating Inner Radiance and the Body of Immortality: An Awakening of the Soul through Modern Etheric Movement* (2012) (an 'encyclopedia' of spiritual-scientific/religious-artistic practice for our time that carries forward the work on a 'science of the whole' on which Novalis himself embarked, as fully elaborated in my book on Novalis (pp.94ff), and touched on below, pp.50ff).

**3)** *Elijah Come Again* (2009) (being a full exposition of the deep spiritual biography of the Novalis-Individuality over the ages.)

***** To all this should be added, at some more advanced point, **also** a full viewing and experience of Powell's presentation of 'The Shambhala Path,' as the latest and the climactic development of a Novalis-inspired activity in our time. (See the link above.) A good number of the practices included in Powell's *Cultivating Inner Radiance* have been expanded upon and further deepened in 'The Shambhala Path').

[For a full Bibliography by Robert Powell, see https://sophiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Robert-Powell-Publication-List-2014.pdf ]

## Epilogue

In *The Way of Novalis*, p.125, I asked about Novalis: "Where did his sense of purpose go after the defeat of the appeal he makes" among his eminent friends in the sphere of literature, philosophy, and religion in his time, as for "the transcendental project he was so ready to proclaim" and to build on?

It went underground but, if anywhere, has surfaced again today in the wide-ranging Sophia culture that has gathered over a few decades now around the life-work (among others associated with the Sophia Foundation of North America) of Robert Powell.

I have no doubt that Novalis would have seen himself deeply reflected in the solemn activities of this culture.

But there have been other major influences on this culture as mediated principally by Powell, most notably those of Valentin Tomberg and Rudolf Steiner.

I have concentrated on Powell here because he is less known than either Steiner or Tomberg, but there is also the very deep line in Powell back to Steiner whose formulations bear more directly on the foundations for the level of breakthrough in visionary experience I have been outlining here with reference to Shakespeare and to Novalis.[65]

Apart from how I have presented Shakespeare (both in this document and in *Remembering Shakespeare*), those familiar with Steiner will recognize in my study of Novalis also, from the chapter "Novalis Carrying on with Himself" right through to the end, the same foundations in visionary development as we find developed and elaborated by Steiner more consciously and fully. I have already alluded here to, arguably, Steiner's most fundamental work from this point of view: "Knowledge of the Higher Worlds," which makes for a substantial beginning in our understanding of what is at stake (I have in this respect myself offered a compendium of Steiner's thought in my collection of his earlier texts in *The Thinking Spirit*, cited above). Steiner remains, unarguably, the main foundational reference-point in all this, as Powell himself has always fully acknowledged. In seeking a necessary grounding today for our further evolution in consciousness from here, it is to Steiner that one will have first recourse. This was the case originally with Valentin Tomberg (who spent over 25 years building on Steiner's teachings), no less than it would have been the case today for Novalis.

The work of Steiner indeed continues to hold its foremost place as the matrix of all further progress in this direction…

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[Endnote 3

[On an Essential Interassociation between
Tragic Romance and the Higher Life

I have spoken above (on p.12) of "the all-deciding dynamic between Tragic Romance and the Higher Life" in the evolutionary fate of the Modern West. That this had become at some point, in fact, the decisive relation in its cultural history is borne out by the way in which Rudolf Steiner himself proceeds in our time to establish the basis for the only genuine development of the Higher Life that will be possible in the future. In the very first of his 'Mystery Dramas,' it

[65] See Chapter 1 of *The Riddle of the Sophia* for a close comparative account of the three distinctive paths to the higher life offered respectively by Tomberg, Steiner, and Novalis—Ed.

is precisely this inescapable dynamic relation that is principally highlighted, and it is arguable that if Johannes does not fully undergo his suffering of that relation as presented there, none of the rest of what is developed in these Dramas becomes possible. This is to point Johannes's indispensable centrality in the developing fates of the other characters in these Dramas who are also intent on a process of development in the Higher Life. See my monograph on these Dramas, *The New School of the Imagination: Rudolf Steiner's Mystery Plays in Literary Tradition* at

https://www.academia.edu/108697118/The_New_School_of_the_Imagination_Rudolf_Steiners_Mystery_Plays_in_Literary_Tradition

Johannes has had the Romance, and it has issued in Tragedy, and now he must confront the guilty depths of tragic human nature that have driven him in this experience. Principally this concerns his wilful separation from the Beloved and his failure to feel any guilt in separating from her, but also the form his engagement in that Romance takes, falling short as he does of a complete sincerity in it, as it happens in his case. Otherwise, the possibility of Romance was *all that it should be,* for it is the *necessary ground* for any further genuinely human development in his experience: it is only because he suffers through an occult form and level of guilt pertaining to that particular form of engagement, i.e., Romance as such, that Johannes can find that particular depth of spiritual "strength" that alone will give him the power at last to see his integral way through into the Higher Life. In short, without Johannes having undergone the Romance as this has issued in Tragedy, the Higher Life which he comes to know would not have taken place. It is the same pattern one finds both in the Shakespearean evolution we have traced, as well as in Novalis's own evolutionary fate.[66] At the same time, it cannot be a matter of a merely-willed separation from the Beloved such as Kierkegaard for instance pursued, as opposed to separation motivated by what we may describe as a naturally fateful wilfulness, as in our instance.[67] Nor

[66] See the third part of "Othello's Sacrifice" in my *Remembering Shakespeare*, 2016, as well as *The Way of Novalis*, 2014.

[67] Kierkegaard's separation from Regina (a famous story) was, contrastingly, deliberately conceptualized. The key point about *Tragic* Romance is that it is *bound to be tragic,* and that it constitutes *for just this reason* an essential experience in the whole evolutionary process in spiritual vision. In fact, one must have, or have had, the experience … to grow out fully in the end, morally and imaginatively. That all romance *is* fated to end tragically is a point that Kierkegaard is making negatively when he rather too violently decides to abort it with his Regina: "When two people fall in love and begin to feel that they are made for one another, then it is time for them to break off, for by going on they have everything to lose and nothing to gain." The main point here is that the romance must be *seen through* to the end, and in a *naturally fated* way, if there is to be a real moral evolution in the human being. It cannot be just willfully aborted, as Kierkegaard presumed he could do, to avoid the inevitable tragic consequence and get on with his moral mission, which for this reason was bound to be a mission finally abstracted from human experience.

can there be any hope of an integral experience of the Higher Life for anyone who would continue to insist on the Romance through all, as was the sad case of Edouard Schuré in Steiner's own time, who finally lost his bearings in his experience.[68] Otherwise Schuré's engagement in Romance in the first place was altogether the right way to be going if any later experience of the Higher Life *was* to be an integral one, so deeply grounded as such Romance is in a reality that has for long confounded human nature and would, for this very reason, have to be worked through.[69]

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In my recently published book, *Tragical Historical*—see this book at

https://www.academia.edu/146733207/Tragical_Historical_Essays_in_Western_Cultural_History_from_Boethius_to_Beckett —

I offer a representative outline of the course Western Cultural History has taken from the time of the Middle Ages right through to Modern Times. Far from seeking to predetermine the outcome of these studies, my purpose was simply to concentrate on what were, in the case of the earliest works in that History, literally the most widely read of these; further along in time, it is a case of those works which can easily be said to be among the most widely valued for their centrality to the age in which they appeared.[70] What eventually emerged from these studies quite of their own was a set of patterns that point to what are certainly *some* of the most, if not *the* most, defining of those tendencies in that History that have paved the way to the dead-end in which Humanity finds itself today, having reached our own so troubled, indeed disturbed,

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[68]On this subject, see the article by Richard Ramsbotham in *New View*, Issue 98: "The Importance of Freedom and the Future of Culture: Who was the original Johannes Thomasius?" As Schuré's case illustrates, the romance *has to be* finally *outgrown*, and cannot be just craftily set aside, as seems to have been Schuré's idea with his Marguerita. He seems to have acted on this idea (along with his beloved) to ensure that the romance between them would continue to attend on him in his esoteric development as an undefeated memory, a course which, in the end, could only have confounded him in that development, which *is* what happened..

[69] And what, we will ask, of the Beloved herself, who was abandoned? Johannes's guilt has justified her, but she has also had her own fate. What can it mean that the Beloved must die, herself dies? Answer: as borne out in the Shakespearean evolution, as in that of Novalis, *her death saves*… A woman's fate would seem to be quite different, the development after separation on quite another path—not the path of the Hero, but the path of the Mother, without whose further intervention in his fate, in fact, the Hero would be doomed. No doubt this points to the prospect in time of what will be another set of Mystery Dramas, to go alongside those of the Hero, devoted to the Mother. Steiner's series of Dramas do not give us this.

[70] In the case of the earliest works: *The Consolation of Philosophy*, *The Romance of the Rose*, *The Book of the Courtier*, and, among these most widely read books, in a later age: Rousseau's *Julie*. In the case of works from a later age, the authors considered include Matthew Arnold, Friedrich Nietzsche, Carl Jung, among a good number of others…

Modern Times. In this book's Preface I offered a summary of these patterns which are fully developed in the rest of the book:

> *in the case of moralistic tradition, an overdetermining of our ends that has left us with a lack of nerve before the tragic depths of human experience;*
>
> *a put-on contempt for passion-love that has otherwise haunted and undermined us with its alluring promises to this day;*
>
> *the pretension to naturalism as a deliberate flouting of the ideal world;*
>
> *the barren interventions of eminent genius…*

All is of a piece here: what has principally dictated the direction Western Culture has taken has been the moral-philosophical imperative, measured against which—the presumption is—human tragedy and the Romantic passion-love that at some point contributes to it are judged to be merely aberrations.[71] The consequence of this deliberate short-circuiting of human experience has been a denial of those tragic depths in human nature that *must* be consciously engaged if we would not be undermined by them subconsciously, as it turns out has been the fatal case in late Western Culture in the last analysis.

It was the aim of Rudolf Steiner's Mystery Dramas, among other purposes, precisely to lift us out of this final impasse in Western culture. Tragic human nature would have to be fully engaged with, which includes for us in this later age *as well* that inevitable disposition to Romance in human nature in which Humanity has been additionally involved from the time of the Middle Ages onwards, *even if*, and indeed just *because*, this disposition will lead to Tragedy in one way or another and *in due course* engage us in our guilt. All of which becomes in turn *the primordial and indispensable ground of experience* out of which any further *integral* evolution in the Higher Life can materialize. It is all-telling in this respect that Novalis's close associate and friend, Friedrich Schlegel, should have *envied* Novalis his tragic life in this respect, and this from the very midst of Schlegel's own quite happy one with his Beloved at the time. Something, he knew, was missing from his life that he might never get to know, and this would only abort any development in the Higher Life he would want for himself. See my essay on this astonishing admission at https://issuu.com/johnomeara1797/docs/friedrich_schlegel_s_lucinde

The whole matter can be put more pointedly if also cryptically:

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[71] Passion-love is more generally known to us today as romantic love. For a short history of passion-love up to Rousseau's time, see especially Chapter 9 of *Tragical*: "Rousseau and the Legacy of Passion-Love: Old and New Heloise."

Humanity can only evolve any further from here by making ourselves drastically responsible for the tragic death of the Beloved *in every possible sense and at every level* in which this has been, and can be, experienced (for 'drastically' here, read finally 'occultly'—for the experience turns out to be supported at some higher level by those who know that such is indeed the path.)

The evolution one has in mind will necessarily be an evolution out of Tragic Romance into the Higher Life.

Such is the situation in which we find ourselves today, such the situation in which Western culture finds itself today, at what is now a momentous turning-point in human evolution.

Novalis anticipated this impasse that was to come in our time. His was an exemplary experience of Tragic Romance as the basis for an evolution in the Higher Life, Romance which begins from *and is rooted in* Loving the Earth So Much ('I loved the earth so much' he says, before he undertakes so painfully to transform and evolve further out of this experience into the Higher Life.)—And so Shakespeare also, on another—in his case, purely imaginative—plane…

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[Endnote 4

[On the Issue of Goethe's *Faust*, Part One and Part Two:
Rudolf Steiner and the Critics

Here I shall not be citing specific critics on Goethe's *Faust*, but rather invoking the well-established view maintained by innumerable critics and commentators on Goethe's work—ever since the whole of *Faust* first appeared—of the superior relevance and achievement of *Faust* Part One, in comparison with what Goethe many years later finally offered his readership as Part Two.

At its best, this view is solidly based in a longstanding and naturally ongoing concern with the seemingly ineluctably tragic limitations of the human condition, so powerfully conveyed in Part One, which appeared to these many critics to have been wilfully flouted by Goethe in Part Two. In the light, or darkness, of Goethe's apparently deliberate avoidance and denial of tragedy, so much of Goethe's presentation in Part Two comes across as all the more fantastically unreal, with its wishful back-tracking to earlier cultural epochs, medieval and

classical, and a somewhat highfalutin synthesis dramatized between them finally offered as an ultimate model of reality. In this back-tracking Goethe would naturally appear to many as having become in later age very strangely insensitive and indeed oblivious to the beleaguered, tragically baffled plight of Modern-day Humanity, which he had dramatized so outstandingly in Part One.

Building on this same perception of the avoidance of tragedy, I have offered (above) a reading of the relationship between Part One and Part Two that, more generously, brings out Goethe's admitted limitation in this respect precisely as the ground for his venturing further to provide Modern-day Humanity with more than its unhappily circumscribed condition. He now offers it a further cultural "space" elsewhere; in this fresh space, Humanity can expand into what I call a Supernal Life of Imagination that would isolate the best of what those former periods had to offer by way of deeper insight into the more esoteric processes of Nature and the Spirit… Here in these farther regions of Imagination, it would be possible at least for now to live oneself out as fully as possible beyond tragic limitation precisely…

Rudolf Steiner, for his part, takes the matter much further.[72] In his view, focusing these deeper processes of Nature and Spirit in Part Two, as Goethe does, with such a uniquely full dramatic intensity, Goethe was, in fact, building on a real possibility of esoteric vision that was coming out of his own age—in Goethe himself. Behind Goethe's elaborate demonstrations of these processes, Steiner claims, was an esoteric power of insight that was all Goethe's own, which it took him many years to develop, and in its own way this insight anticipates the full expression of an immediately effective spiritual science which Steiner had at last come to provide Humanity with, in his time. Those intimate inner processes of knowledge of Nature and of the Spirit that Goethe was dramatizing represent, in fact, the development of a direct insight of his own into such matters.

To what extent this was the case, according to Steiner, will strike most of us as fictional, given our own limited experience. With his Faust, Goethe in Part Two had *"transported"* himself into that former time *in fact*[73]. This Goethe achieves through an advanced process of spiritual thinking power which Steiner attests is indeed available, on the basis of a fully practiced spiritual science, or with the appropriate self-work. Such a spiritual power had taken Goethe years to develop. Helen herself, the Helen of classical times, in this way *actually appears* to Goethe in his time in her reincarnated consciousness as a spirit, a measure of what the backtracking process we have spoken of actually signifies in this drama. Hence the value of the drama in Part Two *as*

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[72] In all references that follow I refer the reader to Steiner's comments as collected in *Anthroposophy in the Light of Goethe's 'Faust',* SteinerBooks, 2014. At some point below the references zero in more specifically on a Lecture given in Dornach, Switzerland on May 22nd 1915, 127-149.

[73] "Transported" is the term that is attributed to Steiner in our text, cited above*, Ibid.*, 162.

*reality*: Goethe could have the immediate experience of that possibility.[74] As Steiner puts it (in the terms we have considered on p.3), it was in this highly special and extraordinary way that Goethe could be said to have "carried over an infinite amount from the age of the Intellectual Soul into the age of the Spiritual Soul." Whatever we may finally think of all this—it will appear more than far-fetched to those unfamiliar with Steiner's spiritual science, but fully and coherently accounted for by him to anyone who *is* familiar with it, the prospect of our reincarnation being an article of faith in this culture—to claim so much for Goethe's presentation in Part Two of *Faust*, and indeed the whole of Part Two, is to say very much on behalf of this Part as a demonstration of spiritual consciousness in Modern Times.

II

But if Steiner can make so much of Part Two, it is because he accepts what Goethe had made in the meantime of the problem of human tragedy in the transition from Part One to Part Two in having Faust "forget" it (this is also Steiner's way of describing Goethe's manoeuvre) and to pass on from it.

How could Steiner have arrived at this view so paradoxical and indeed offensive as this will appear to those (and I am one of these) who will not in the meantime have forgotten Goethe's deliberate repudiation of tragedy, as a consequence of which only is he in any position to go on in the seemingly free and blithe way he does in Part Two?

Steiner fully clarifies how he sees the two Parts of *Faust* relating to each other. Far from seeking continuity between them on a realistic plane, he views the two Parts as constituting a kind of artistic Diptych, held together only by the opening of Part Two which operates as a kind of hinge. Thus do the two Parts stand somewhat incongruously side by side each other. They were, after all, written in radically distinct parts of Goethe's life. Part One was begun in the very earliest period of Goethe's literary career and finally rounded out as a work only some 25 years later, before it was finally published in 1808. The writing of Part Two was not finally undertaken for another 15 years or so after that, in the last 5 to 6 years before Goethe's death.

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[74] See Lectures 1 and 2 in *Anthroposophy in the Light of Goethe's 'Faust*: "the urge arose in Goethe to bring over into the new age what it was from the Greco-Roman period that could live on in any period as something eternal … The fourth cultural period was living on unconsciously in the fifth one … How can it be brought forward in a conscious way? … What would some living element of the Greco-Roman culture look like if we could bring it over into our present-day awareness consciously? … A chord was struck in Goethe's soul … the whole problem of reincarnation or re-embodiment (72-73) … How can a consciousness be recuperated consciously? How can one, for example, recuperate the consciousness that lived in Helen?" (81) … And so can Helen "in the third act of Part Two … appear before us in the flesh … The way to connect with Helen is … by really living through the mysteries of existence and experiencing the reality of reincarnation … We see the doctrine of reincarnation secretly woven into the second part of *Faust* in a poetic and artistic way" (60-61).

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Steiner proceeds on the basis that Part One represents the elaboration of a typically youthful level of life immersed in, and indeed lost to, an indulgence in what he describes as the "lower life" of the "passions." Part Two represents, in its turn, the elaboration of a life that can be experienced only after a progress of many years, in a finally matured wisdom, such as finally gives Faust and his author access to the saving development of a "higher life" of "the spirit." The combination of the two Parts is what gives to Goethe's work its unique power and status as a comprehensive representation of a complete striving of human soul: "the World's greatest poetic work of human striving," in Steiner's final judgment.

In the context of such a different reading, the question of the tragic guilt Faust has in the meantime incurred is itself approached on a significantly different basis.

Steiner does not make light of this guilt: he paints it as "the heaviest guilt imaginable": "Faust has a human life on his conscience; he has deceived a human being": and Steiner otherwise notes how "great and powerful" is the "guilt Faust has burdened himself with."[75] What's more, he insists: "Mephisto has Faust in his clutches … We must not imagine that Faust, as we see him at the beginning of Part Two, is in any sense set free from these hellish powers." Notwithstanding, *in spite of* this great depth of embroilment in guilt still perceived and experienced by Faust, "there is something in human nature—the higher human self—that maintains its connection with the spiritual powers of the world" and that "has not been able to fall prey to guilt." In the meantime, to be able to wake up from all this and stand free again in the spirit, Faust would have to "undergo a special transformation that we can call the transformation of guilt into a higher kind of knowledge." Hence Faust's equally powerful living, at this moment of awakening, into "the spirit of the earth's aura with which this higher self is connected"; that alone can make this transformation possible. Steiner goes so far as to see it as a case of Faust's guilt becoming "the source of a higher and more precise knowledge of life which is gradually dawning on him"; in this way, "despite … the enormous burden of guilt upon his soul, the possibility is opening up for him to be embraced by what lives, moves and weaves through the world as spirit." It is not quite clear from Steiner's account precisely how Faust's guilt can become in this way "the source" of his new higher life in the spirit, except, conceivably, as a basis for Faust's motivation in seeking now to make himself into a more ethically developed human being. A reference by Steiner in a later part of his account invokes the idea that it is just as well that Faust has put aside his guilt, for it is imperative for him in the meantime to allow "something else" to "develop in him that, as his higher self, will protect him from what is coming in later incarnations."

[75] For all quotations in this and the following paragraphs, see the lecture given in Dornach, Switzerland on May 22nd 1915, 127-149.

And here is the key perspective in Steiner's view of all these developments: "the Faust that could incur guilt … that succumbed to guilt"—by which Steiner intends the passionate choice of life Faust had made that plunged him so deeply into tragic consequences—all this "will have to wait until its next incarnation" for its resolution: "this has to be left to the next incarnation." *Two* Fausts thus show themselves to our view: there is the Faust who emerges to us now in Part Two as the one who is, yet and already, inwardly involved in embracing the higher life, and that other "guilt-laden Faust" who even by now already "lies deeply buried in his subconscious for safekeeping until his next incarnation." That is the paradox: that "even now, the spirit has freed itself from what has to be preserved until the next incarnation." Most especially, it is a matter of "no longer wanting, as the Faust of Part One still did, to fling himself into life the way it threw him into guilt and evil deeds," and "after this night" Faust has "come to that point." It is not quite clear whether Steiner is saying that Goethe was himself consciously thinking along these very lines in bringing the two Parts together: Faust will only be able to settle his situation in his next incarnation, and in the meantime is bound to work at himself in a higher way if he is to have any hope of coming to terms with himself in that next incarnation. It seems unlikely that Goethe was thinking precisely those thoughts, whatever his best imaginative intuition of the problem might be. The tone of Steiner's account in context strongly suggests that he is, rather, sharing some better knowledge of the situation with his audience who were already familiar with such spiritual concepts as Steiner is building on here…

## III

I have stood by the view, shared with many other critics and commentators, that by going on so blithely with Part Two, however grand its achievement may be in its own consequential function, Goethe in fact betrayed himself as the master tragedian he had shown himself to be in Part One. It is just because Faust cannot in Part One break through with the Spirit of the Earth, just as Goethe himself could not, that he falls back, along with his author, on what is left to him as an imaginative course of life that yet itself leads progressively to tragedy. This failure to come through, which Goethe himself experienced, is a real fact of the human condition, and where else is there to go because of this? There is a very strange reductionism here to Steiner's account of Part One. To describe Faust's further course of life as conveyed there merely as a case of an indulgence in the "lower passions" and in "evil deeds"[76] will seem to us (especially for Steiner) a startling aesthetic simplification. Faust and Gretchen are incontestably (probably for everyone) Romantic Lovers in the grandest sense of "Love in the Western World," [77] and the tragic complications of human nature, deep-set and immovable as

[76] *Anthroposophy in the Light of Goethe's 'Faust,'* respectively 74 and 146.
[77] See the book by this title by Denis de Rougemont.

they are also in them, have indeed brought it about that the circumstances engaged have in the end brought on Gretchen's death. There is a great guilt attached to this for Faust. And here Faust is in a situation directly comparable to those of Shakespeare's own tragic heroes: that of Hamlet with Ophelia, Othello with Desdemona, Lear with Cordelia (on another plane of Love).

I have traced in some depth precisely how out of this tragedy Shakespeare very bravely fights his way through to another saving higher life *immediately*, through a further direct confrontation with the human tragedy as conveyed through the multiple situations of his lovers. That exemplary achievement is what sets Shakespeare in the end apart from all other authors over the next few centuries right up to our age, including Goethe, and except for Novalis (as presented above). The problem of Tragic Romance is *the* problem of Modern Times, before which only these two authors showed themselves equal to the task of a direct evolutionary development on the basis of a full immediate confrontation with this problem, an achievement that involved them in roughly 2 to 3 more years of the questing will. In Steiner's own Mystery Drama, *The Portal of Initiation*, written and performed only a few years before his account of *Faust* that we have been focusing on here, his main character Johannes, on whose success everything of a higher development that is presented later in this Drama depends, goes the very route that Shakespeare's characters did and Faust does not. He confronts, occultly, the very consequences of guilt pertaining to the Tragic Romance in which he had gotten involved in the course of his own life. In this way Steiner takes the foregoing achievement of those two Exemplars in Modern Western Tradition, Shakespeare more especially, decisively and once for all into our own times. The Higher Life will only emerge finally from the confrontation with Tragic Romance (as argued in Endnote 3 above), just the confrontation Goethe had himself shied away from…

IV

What, then, does the disparity in Steiner's two approaches to the situation of Tragic Romance, in *Faust* and in his own Drama, suggest?

First, that Goethe did not have it in him to cope directly with such guilt as Faust incurs and was himself forced to go another way. Unable to ply his way through, he had to get out, to lift himself out of his beleaguered situation, which could only encumber him as it remained issueless for him, out and away into another cultural world in a remote and great past where he put himself in the position to continue to expand in spirit. This is Steiner's own view of Goethe's situation; Goethe knew that it had to be so for him.

In the meantime, in his presentation of how guilt such as Faust's is to be looked upon, Steiner does not address the outstanding issue of the two contrary views of the relationship to

such guilt that emerges with further reference to his own *Portal of Initiation*. Steiner does not bring his audience in on this issue, carries on here entirely with the view that guilt is to be left "to the next incarnation." It is surely to be assumed from the context of his address that the view that such guilt (and quite possibly all guilt) was to be put off to the next incarnation is one that Steiner was implying his audience would have to be making its own, (for all guilt sticks irremediably to the soul in the present life, in any case—such is the understanding Steiner shares with his audience here). Among other things that this remarkable position said (a position that could easily encourage dubious forms of self-entitlement) was the fact that, made to focus on this particular view of how such guilt is to be dealt with, Steiner's group would be seen by him to be more in the position of Goethe's Faust than of Steiner's Johannes.[78] Not for the members of this group to pretend to go the way of Johannes just yet; better to educate themselves with Goethe's *Faust* first, and at least to take in for now what Johannes otherwise demonstrates as an advanced esoteric fate for their time, but *without* pretending to go the way of Johannes themselves, for like Faust they would have to wait till the next incarnation. They would have to wait as Faust and Goethe behind him had had to wait…

But why the reductionism, so anomalous, in Steiner's treatment of the Tragic Romance between Faust and Gretchen, which he otherwise vaunts of at one point as "a marvellous tragedy"[79]?

One can only assume here a rather special tactical consideration on Steiner's part who was clearly seeking in his lectures to direct the attention of his audience away from Part One in order to focus primarily on Part Two and for the most part on those dimensions of Part One which anticipate it and contribute to its unfolding later in Goethe's life. To paint Faust's situation as a case merely of "lower passions" and "evil deeds" and that only in "a next incarnation" would he be able to deal with such a depth of culpability: this would certainly make it easier to get on to Part Two. But is this view of the import of Faust's extraordinarily involved destiny and course of life really his case? And what of the proportionately extraordinary awe in which Part One has been held by audiences for decades, or the insistent dismay before the spectacle of Faust's tragedy in which they have been left? It is precisely the *inevitability* of Tragedy that dictates the further need to confront its challenge and to see this challenge through into a triumphant Higher Life until now rarely achieved. The idea, what's more, that Faust's depth of guilt could be dealt with only in "a next incarnation" is belied by the fact that, by confronting *his* guilt immediately, Steiner's Johannes himself manages what Goethe's Faust does

[78] Steiner's audience at this time was, in fact, a rather special group gathered around work that was being done on their future centre of spiritual-scientific work, named the Goetheanum, in Dornach, Switzerland. They were being prepared by him for their own destiny in the higher life.

[79] *Anthroposophy in the Light of Goethe's 'Faust,'* 57.

not, to the point indeed of echoing Faust's situation, for the voice that haunts Johannes with guilt echoes strongly that of Gretchen herself.[80] However one breaks this situation down, it is to Part Two that Steiner in these lectures will go. According to Steiner's account, Goethe was not ready for a direct spiritual vision in his early years and *Faust* Part One is the record of that limitation. Over many years of further personal development, Goethe at last does make himself ready, and of this achievement *Faust* Part Two is the record. But let us be clear as to the limits of Goethe's achievement even in this grand respect. He became a grand harbinger of the spiritual science that was to come, but he was not for all that himself in that direct line of evolutionary history to which Shakespeare and Novalis belong that finally brings it in.

There had been a great Spiritual Demonstration on Goethe's part, with much to learn from this about the basis in fact of a spiritual-scientific development of consciousness—this Demonstration being more than worthy perhaps of the tremendous esteem in which Steiner, for one, holds Part Two especially—but this was not a Demonstration that could *in its own terms* be carried over into Modern Times as we know them today. All is carried out within the confines of Goethe's Age beyond which nothing more could materialize in these terms. It had been a "*going away* from the Spiritual Soul to the Intellectual or Mind Soul, which was gradually *dying out*." Goethe's was, by Steiner's own admission, not a pure evolutionary development of consciousness in historical terms, for in this process Goethe had gone away from the Spiritual Soul and the further evolutionary development that in this matter concerned *it* especially, on which line of development Shakespeare and Novalis *are* to be found. Goethe finds himself eventually developing a spiritual science all his own that forecasts Steiner's finally fully achieved form of it, but it remains for all this, strictly-speaking, *premonitory* work in Goethe, of great educational value as a springboard for a study of spiritual science such as Steiner was himself presenting as the now fully-fledged thing it had become by his time, but Goethe's path is not a straight one through to our times, not a direct *evolutionary* route through; there has not, in his case, been a passage through the great needle's eye of Tragic Romance that could only have been the way through. Romantic Love brought to the point of Tragedy, not wilfully but by a natural determination of Events, *and only then renounced*, was the only way, for only in this way could the fullness of human nature have been known. Humankind would have to have experienced Romantic Love if only for that purpose. Nor was it a matter of anything less than a full engagement in such Love in the first place for the full evolutionary development of human

[80] This connection I have traced in my monograph on Steiner's Mystery Dramas, *The New School of the Imagination*, published some 17 years ago, in 2007 (see pp.5-6). Indeed, as I show in *The New School*, Johannes's achievement brings to historical fulfilment the whole import of post-Renaissance Western literary-cultural experience, in both its German *and* English manifestations, up to that point.

nature to come about that finally opens out on the prospect of a Higher Life as accounted for by Steiner in our times (all this I have recounted above in Endnote 3).

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A Final Statement
On the Role of the Initiate in Our Time

It hardly needs to be said here that, of course, in their initiate's life both Rudolf Steiner and Robert Powell stand beyond—though they otherwise lay a bridge for it towards resolution—that inevitable, historical-dialectical, lay process of the tragic-romantic crisis that had been for so long the predestined challenge to the modern humanistic consciousness, and whose representative dramatization for our instructional benefit I have claimed in these pages we should especially remember Shakespeare and Novalis for, canonically. What my highlighting of Steiner and Powell otherwise suggests is that for the immediate, and perhaps a long-term, present, literature will have first to go through the alembic of such contemporary initiate-philosophy if it is to ever emerge again as the dominant force it has been in the past. See my 'Preface' to *Tragical Historical*, cited above, [p.27].

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[Endnote 5

[On Rilke's Inverted Relationship to Novalis,
as Modern Orphic poet
(see p.12 above)

[On this subject, consider this extract from the author's correspondence with Gary Geddes—Ed.

"I am happy to think you have read through the Novalis book also, especially since that now puts you in the position to appreciate more how Rilke comes into a relationship with him as I present the matter in my Rilke book (if and when you get back to that book).
Your terms, transcendental and empiricist, are useful tools to express what I make of all this. None of this is very easy. I think Novalis's transcendental *is* empirically based, Rilke's empiricism transcendentally based, but at the same time Novalis's empiricist is not Rilke's, Rilke's transcendental is not Novalis's.

And how to bridge the two seemingly opposed worlds is precisely the issue I would finally raise about them.

This issue is all the more poignant as Rilke himself seems to be aware of it in the depths, in his subliminal association with Novalis, which is established in Rilke early on, though he clearly insists on distinguishing himself from Novalis in the end.

Rilke is compelled to give over the struggle towards transcendence in Novalis's terms on account of the way he is tragically impacted by Lou Salome in his early years.

*He* resists renunciation because he can only continue to embrace his dead Beloved/Eurydice (the Lou Salomé of Rilke's early Florentine days.)

Thus can human tragedy continue to have its own way…

The result is itself sublimely revealing in its own right, but also existentially ambiguous, in Rilke's own terms." JOM

[See, also, from *Orpheus Redux*
https://books.google.ca/books/about/Orpheus_Redux_A_Memoir.html?id=rP5LEQAAQBAJ&redir_esc=y

p.65:

"There are issues raised between Rilke and Novalis finally that must be reserved for a still more advanced stage of inquiry in the future. Is Rilke's seemingly opposite direction from that taken by Novalis (back down to the earth rather than up towards heaven) a step backward in evolutionary terms? Or is it paradoxically a progression, pointing to the need in the future for a higher synthesis of extremes than what Novalis himself conveys, one more comprehensively attentive to the sway tragedy can have? Seen thus, a close, in-depth study of their lives and work would seem to reveal that Rilke and Novalis hold the future between them, but who will rise up to meet the challenge represented by the issues they raise?"

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[N.B. The author has alerted me additionally to passages deemed especially relevant to the foregoing comments about Rilke's inverse relationship to Novalis: from *Rilke in the Making: A Comprehensive Study of His Life and Work, in Three Volumes* (2023):

pp.291(289,290)-312 /pp.415-422 /pp.459-461,

and as background to this material:

pp.56-58 (including notes—also, exceptionally n.68)
and pp.151-162 on
"Rilke's Defeated Hopes After Florence"]

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[Endnote 6

[On Poetic Creativity and the Sophianic Process

*See the Vladimir Solovyov text provided at the end of this Note.*

*Vladimir Solovyov's Model*

Vladimir Solovyov, the great Russian Sophiologist, can himself be said to be in a line of succession from Shakespeare and Novalis, as Steiner and Powell are, as we have seen, in *their* own, somewhat more removed spheres. Solovyov bases his whole philosophical-poetic experience of the world in the very same, shared, structural notions governing our evolutionary development in consciousness and experience. The terms of his comments in the text given below, if differently conceived, yield themselves to the same breakdown of interrelated **stages and spheres** that we have traced in the others (see above, pp.12-14, including n.45):

**I**

(rational contemplation)
the idea of good
the higher meaning of life
a reality that is for us otherworldly and drawing nigh

**II**

communication with images from
the kingdom of glory and eternal beauty
(cosmic nature)

**III**

the perfect content of being
the beauty of the future life
the infinite power of love
(the divine world)

I shall elaborate at length on the correspondence with the phrasings that characterize the notions of those others in a moment.

Here, to note forthwith that, along with Steiner and Powell and predating them, Solovyov sees this evolutionary development more strictly or overtly than do Shakespeare or Novalis as a matter of expansive living in with the Sophia. It is well-known, and has indeed by

now been well-established, that Solovyov's notions were, for their part, constructed on a genuine, immediate vision of the divine Sophia herself.[81]

*

Some time later, Pavel Florensky and Sergei Bulgakov took up this Sophiological direction in Solovyov's formulations on the basis of their own inner experience of the Sophia, though this would appear to have stopped short at an actual, direct vision of Her. Even so, their own formulations are immensely clarifying of the evolutionary development in question.

Addressing the close interassociation between the three main stages and spheres of this development, enacting as they do a deeper and deeper progression into the creation, Florensky notes that it is precisely the Sophia Who makes this development possible, serving as She does as "the absolute root of creation". It is She Who, when reached interiorly, makes it possible that experience at one stage, now fully realized, shall open out on the next. Still more to the point, Bulgakov speaks of a "coinherence" of the stages, which only the Sophia makes possible, because *She* is "the world in God," which is to say where Self, Nature, and God meet, in a progressive evolutionary creation, "from the external side as beauty of nature and the internal side as love," as Solovyov puts it…

*Pavel Florensky's Model*

Solovyov's model in focus here is metaphysical in import, Florensky's psychological. The latter's terms, provided from that point of view, fill out further our sense of the stages of development in question:

**I**
the bearing of the spirit
(cf. ascesis)

**II**
love-pity for the creation

**III**
being-in-love with the creation[82]

[81] A contemporary *locus classicus* of Solovyov's writings in this regard (philosophical, visionary, and poetic) is the *Divine Sophia*: *The Wisdom Writings of Vladimir Solovyov*, ed. Judith Deutsch Kornblatt, Cornell University Press, 2009. See also my essay, "Solovyov on Sophia, the World Soul, and Evil" in '*The Riddle of the Sophia' and Other Essays*, cited above.

[82] See my full breakdown of these terms in my essay, "On the Sophia and the Relation to the Creation: Pavel Florensky and Sergei Bulgakov" in *'The Riddle of the Sophia'*. Steiner breaks stages II and III down as follows: in the case of II, the Self still stands apart from the creation, in the case of III it has fully merged and united with it, has become, that is, what the creation is and what the Self is, all in one, which is to say all *in God*, through a climactic mediation of the resurrected Christ (cf. the Damascean experience invoked above, in n.45).

"The bearing of the spirit" corresponds to the stage of evolutionary development represented by the meeting between Pericles and Marina in Shakespeare's *Pericles* (see, once again, the correspondences as outlined on pp.12-14). This scene concerns the emergence of the Self or I in its *inmost* significance, from which *specific* point all the rest of the evolution will, in time, emerge as a matter of law (the forbidding process of 'ascesis' has, in the meantime, been fulfilled). Comparatively, Solovyov's "rational contemplation" has not yet reached that stage, but strongly invokes it, or is on its way there. It corresponds to a certain extent with Novalis's own preliminary work in his Philosophical Writings. "Love-pity for the creation" (where 'pity' translates as 'compassion') corresponds to that further stage of evolutionary development represented in the 'acts' or 'actions' that follow *from* the "bearing of the spirit," as symbolically dramatized in *The Winter's Tale*. (With the outline provided above on pp.12-14, readers can fill out the correspondences from here).

### *The Stages of a "Pure [Poetic] Lyricism"*

Solovyov's metaphysics are elaborated here out of a specific intention of elucidating the poetic creative process and begin from the point where the creative poet initiates his efforts. From this beginning, Solovyov outlines a clear progression in this process.

In *his* elaboration of the stages of evolutionary development, Florensky includes the all-essential pre-stage of *ascesis*, or tragic self-confrontation. This stage, in our terms, corresponds to the whole struggle in tragic romantic experience in Shakespeare and in Novalis as outlined above, but it can clearly have a very broad application to where humanity begins from generally. Solovyov describes it thus, as a case of "finding oneself yet in a world of contention and vague apprehensions." This is where the creative poet begins.

1) In the process "*concerning* himself further with the divine world," for that is the ultimate ground out of which a (Sophianic) poet works (anticipating stage **III**), *concerning* himself thus "by an act of rational contemplation" (anticipating stage **I**), equally with the work of the philosopher,

2) *he now "enters into communication with* vivid images from the kingdom of glory and eternal beauty" (anticipating stage **II**).[83] The poet by this point "catches glimmers of eternal beauty in the flux of our reality,"

[83] "Significant [here] is the connection between philosophy and poetry; the goals and functions of the two are identical," p.43. See the citation for Samuel D. Cioran's book at the end of this Endnote.

3) and (here is a crucial additional qualification bearing on what is, up to this point, an as yet untapped, progressive *depth* of immersion or greater *potential* in this developmental process) "*continuing them further*, anticipate[s], allow[s] us to have premonitions of a reality that is otherworldly and drawing nigh…"

It is all seen here, in fact, from a relative point of view, for "while history is still continuing, we can have only individual and fragmentary premonitions (anticipations) of perfect beauty," but it is otherwise clear from this account *what the full evolutionary development will be for a poet who persists in this process*, which we have said Shakespeare and Novalis, seemingly alone among previous poets, had begun to enact or break into literally. In these cases, we may speak indeed of an "art in the sense of inspired prophecy." For those poets who are still "only" on the way, Solovyov describes it as a case at least of a "positive although incomplete knowledge or penetration into the reality of the divine world," and this is otherwise a proper beginning.[84]

It would be the task of a more advanced form of literary-philosophical criticism to establish just how far along in the visionary process Solovyov himself came *as a poet*.[85] Certainly, as a visionary *per se* and a philosopher, Solovyov takes us well into the realm of real, Sophianic happening. As a poet, he may be otherwise compared with Shakespeare who, with his own symbolic technique in his last plays, invokes an experience that points beyond the strict poetic terms offered to what was likewise for him a real happening.[86] In the case of Novalis, exceptionally, the poetry *is* the fully, conscious real happening.[87] In one form or another, the

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[84] Solovyov captures the *full* development in crystal form in the following words: "Every true poet must necessarily penetrate "into the fatherland (**III**) of flame and word" in order to take from there the primal images (**II**) of his creation, and together with them, the internal lucidity that is called inspiration (**I**)." It is all one process by that point. See n.88 below.

[85] Cioran, for his part, expresses bafflement in this sphere: "The feminine inspiration of Solov'ev's poetry, while unmistakably the Sophia of his theosophy, never appears under that name. Her titles are numerous, but invariably as vague and indefinite as her actual presence. As befits the mysterious nature of her poetic incarnations, more often than not we have only intimations of her presence, echoes and reflections and fleeting encounters with what is little more than an incorporeal and ethereal being. The poet takes great pains to keep the mysterious revelation private and personal, as though its complete divulgence would destroy the vision itself," p.50. See the citation for Samuel D. Cioran's book at the end of this Endnote. One could quote, additionally, Judith Kornblatt in *Divine Sophia* (cited above) who is also speaking of the poems here: "the reader can never be sure of the reality of the vision—or rather in *which* reality it exists—and therefore how seriously (i.e., literally) to understand it," 265.

[86] 'Symbolic' remains a useful, if capacious, term. In Shakespeare we find more specifically a structural symbolism, in Solovyov a poetic symbolism. These terms could be still further refined. See my elaborate account of Shakespeare's case in *Remembering Shakespeare*, cited above, pp.133-178. Solovyov's case must await another exposition.

[87] And not just the poetry. See the chapters "Coming into the Visionary Life" and "The Novel as Refraction of the Life" in my book, *The Way of Novalis*, cited above.

poet today and in the immediate future will, in any case, do well to find their own way into this 'one process and one process only' that will link the Self, Nature, and the Divine, *with an inevitable concreteness,* with the Sophia, who rules in all *as* "the world in God." This poet will do so also as a philosopher of sorts, to some degree initiating themselves at that level of "rational contemplation" of the whole process that at last lays the pure ground for a full breakthrough in visionary happening. Here an immersion in the philosophical-poetic work of Solovyov and Novalis will no doubt serve as a springboard of inspiration, not to mention the fully conscious presentations that likewise lay the ground for this breakthrough in the work of Rudolf Steiner and Robert Powell. At least it is the view of the author of the present essay that this can only be so, if the poet of tomorrow is indeed to find his way into 'the one form and one form only' of the world that lies ahead for us.

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**Quotes from Vladimir Solovyov**

from
*Vladimir Solov'ev and the Knighthood of the Divine Sophia*
by Samuel Cioran (Wilfried Laurier University Press: Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, 1977, 43-45)

*The task of poetry, and of art in general, does not consist of "decorating reality with pleasant contrivances of the living imagination," as it was stated in classical aesthetics, but of incarnating in sensible images that very higher meaning of life to which the philosopher gives definition in rational concepts, which is preached by the moralist and realized by the historical agent as the idea of good. To the artistic sensibility is immediately revealed in the form of sensible beauty that same perfect content of being which is gained through philosophy as a truth of contemplation.*

*While history is still continuing, we can have only individual and fragmentary premonitions (anticipations) of perfect beauty; the arts existing today, in the greatest of their works catching glimmers of eternal beauty in the flux of our reality and continuing them further, anticipate, allow us to have premonitions of a reality that is for us otherworldly and drawing nigh, they serve in this fashion as a transition and connecting link between the beauty of nature and the beauty of the future life. Art comprehended in this manner ceases to be empty amusement and becomes an important and edifying work, but not at all in the sense of didactic sermonizing, but only in the sense of inspired prophecy.*

*And man, as one who belongs to both worlds, can and must by an act of rational contemplation concern himself with the divine world, and finding himself yet in a world of contention and vague apprehensions he must enter into communication with vivid images from the kingdom of glory and eternal beauty. But in*

*particular, this positive although incomplete knowledge or penetration into the reality of the divine world is characteristic of poetic creativity.*[88]

*The general meaning of the universe is revealed in the soul of the poet in a two-fold fashion: from its external side as the beauty of nature, and the internal side as love…These two themes: the eternal beauty of nature and the infinite power of love together make up the essential content of pure lyricism.*

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[The whole of "Shakespeare, Novalis, and their Succession"

drafted between the years 2023 and 2025—Ed.]

[88] The text from which this third quote is taken continues as follows: "Every true poet must necessarily penetrate "into the fatherland of flame and word (**III**)" in order to take from there the primal images (**II**) of his creation, and together with them, the internal lucidity that is called inspiration (**I**)." See Kornblatt, 89. "Into the fatherland of flame and word" quotes from a contemporary poem by A.K.Tolstoy.

# PART II

## *Novalis on a New Humanity, with a Further Note on Novalis's 'Brother' in Christendom, or Europe*[89]

John O'Meara
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The main focus of Novalis's vision in his *Hymns to the Night* is the revelation of the (Sophianic) Mother through the mediation of his beloved Sophie with whom in her death he had at last united. (Novalis launched into the *Hymns* around March of 1799, two years after Sophie's death.) Embedded in his vision of Sophie and the Mother, however, is the further vision of the Christ-Child in the arms of the Mother, as the Virgin Mary embodies Her historically. Novalis notes how this Child's "heavenly heart unfolded … to a flower-like chalice of almighty love … resting on the bliss-boding bosom of the sweetly solemn Mother."[90] All now becomes focused in this Christ-Child, Who is at the centre of all that has become possible for Novalis, Himself the fruit of that "embrace" of the Mother that had so occupied Novalis as the essential working of Nature's higher influence in us.[91] Later on, this Child, by then a grown Man, gave Himself up to Death and at last "in everlasting life death found its goal," since which time "thousands have, out of pangs and tortures, followed thee." Displaced though he was from this original scene, in his own latter-day experience Novalis might yet be counted among those who have been witness to the resurrection from death that followed:

> *They see thee rise again, and themselves with thee; behold thee weep with soft fervour on the blessed bosom of thy mother, walk in thoughtful communion with thy friends, uttering words plucked from the tree of life …*

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[89] This chapter continues from the exposition on Novalis given in Endnote 1 of Part I and should be further referred to the outline of Novalis's overall development given in the graph on p.13.

[90] See Hymn 5. All references to the Crescent Moon edition of the *Hymns to the Night*, tr. George MacDonald, as cited in n.61.

[91] On the subject of this "embrace," see Chapter 8 of my book *The Way of Novalis*, HcP Ottawa, 2014.

Christ's action, as expressed at this time, one might say lived anew in Novalis's own experience, which now saw *him* in his triumph over death "weeping" with Christ on "the blessed bosom of the Mother," "walking in thoughtful communion with his friends [all fellow-believers], uttering words plucked from the tree of life." Beyond this point, the resurrected Christ is described as "hastening" back "to his father's arms" but "bearing … youthful Humanity" with Him, a sign that the revelations of the higher world were now upon us. In the meantime, a mysterious "singer" is said to have appeared at the time of Christ's intervention, as a witness to it, and he is described proclaiming Christ's story to the far ends of the earth. This singer has been seen as an embodiment of the poetic genius of the Greeks, representing "the whole body of poetry which, having its origin in Greek antiquity, then embraced the imagery and the mythology of Christianity, to bring religious understanding to the world."[92] This mysterious Greco-Christian "singer" who made himself consistently present through earlier centuries has again made himself present to Novalis in *his* time, as evidenced also in the two sections of "Christendom and Europe" that suddenly grow ecstatic with intimations of a "a new history, a new humanity" now in the making.[93]

*The Risen Christ Appearing to His Mother by Daniele Monteleone*

In "Christendom" Novalis speaks inspiredly of what has now become spiritually and culturally possible clearly on the basis of the revelation *he* has had and is having. Turning his focus to the Day world (as distinguished from the Night world of his inspiration), Novalis sees the prospect of a new religious order for Europe beyond all sectarian commitments. This order will arise from a new inspirational revelation, and *along with* innumerable other members of a new church, Novalis sees *himself* in the role of the Mother embracing the Christ, having in the meantime *incorporated* Her inspiration:

> *All these things are still only hints, disjointed and rough, but to the historical eye they betray a universal individuality, a new history, a new humanity, the sweetest embrace of*

[92] See Margaret Mahoney Stoljar, *Athenaeum: A Critical Commentary*. Bern/Frankfurt: Herbert Lang and Company, 1973, p.139.

[93] References are to "Christendom or Europe" as this appears in Novalis's *Philosophical Writings*, tr., Margaret Mahoney Stoljar, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997.

*a surprised, young church and a loving God, and the ardent conception of a new messiah in all its thousand members at once.*

*Who does not feel the sweet shame of being with child?*

This Messiah Who is to be born is the re-appearance of Christ in Novalis's own time, and He is to be known along the way Novalis has travelled:

> *consumed as bread and wine, embraced like a beloved woman, breathed as air, heard as word and song, and with heavenly delight, amid the sharpest pangs of love, taken up in the form of death into the innermost part of the body whose turbulence ceases at last.*

*Mother Mary*
*See http://www.goddess.ws/mother-mary.html*

Working out of His own transcendent sphere in association with the Mother, the Messiah reveals Himself further through the higher mystery of social communion (the lesson Novalis had learned while in Teplitz). One's beloved has in the meantime merged into the way the new Messiah reveals Himself in these terms, also through the word and song by which Nature's air is transformed and He is proclaimed, as Novalis himself was in the process of doing. This higher life lies, what's more, in a necessary intrinsic relation to death, for only by the identification of life with death is the perfection of our destiny assured until such time as we will merge more deeply with Christ *in* death.

All the terms of Novalis's long and involved progress in vision are enumerated here, and it is with a sense of all that has come together in his own experience that Novalis invites the readers of "Christendom" to give themselves to the same vision:

> *So come then you too … brush the gray net aside and gaze with young love at the wondrous splendor of nature, history, and humanity …*

In the forging of this new time, the "singer" who passes through in the *Hymns* has *his* crucial role now as "brother":

> *I want to conduct you to a brother who will talk with you so that your hearts rejoice and you* [may] *gird your beloved expired sensation with a new body …*

In what became numbered as the fourth song in his *Spiritual Songs*, Novalis makes reference to "Whom I saw" in his vision at Sophie's grave at the time of her death, which in context leaves no doubt that this was the Christ "Who for us did die," but He Himself is accompanied by

another who would appear to be, as our translator has it[94], this same "friend or brother." In "Christendom" Novalis announces that:

> *This brother is the heartbeat of the new age …*

Of him it is said that

> *He has made a new veil for the Holy Virgin …*

This new veil is none other than the new "song" of creation that this "brother" would inspire in Novalis's time. This brother's inspiration would extend beyond a "singing" that is merely its own activity to a new "musical" organization of the whole creation (a "music of numbers") inclusive of the "spiritual physics" Novalis hoped to see developed as a universal science, a "science of the whole" (as in his *Notes for an Encyclopedia*). Of this "Virgin," Who has re-appeared in Novalis's time in the form of his vision, it is said that "her lips open only to sing"—"singing" having here become a figure for all expressions of the new creation:

> *For me her singing is nothing but the ceremonial call to a new foundation-gathering, the mighty beating of the wings of an angelic herald who is passing.*

This "angelic herald," who is associated with the Virgin's singing, would appear himself to be that same "singer," or "friend" from antiquity become "brother," who has passed through Christian history before, transformed at the time by the event of Christ's coming.[95]

The fifth Hymn from Novalis's *Hymns* ends with a long poem that apostrophizes what had indeed become the main figures in Novalis's vision by this point: the resurrected Christ, and the Mother Who has mediated Novalis's vision of Him. Like the poem that ends the *Hymns* as a whole, this poem is apocalyptic in orientation: already at the end of the fifth Hymn Novalis points to the end-goal of our earthly work with Christ: our return, in time, from the Day world that we continue to inhabit at present back to the everlasting realm of Night as our true home. Death

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[94] George MacDonald, in the Crescent Moon edition cited in n.61, which also contains the *Songs*.

[95] Some critics have taken the "angelic herald" in Novalis's "Christendom" to be Novalis's theologian-friend Friedrich Schleiermacher, largely on the basis of what his name literally denotes: i.e., "veil-maker," and also because Novalis in "Christendom" was in part building on Schleiermacher's recent example in his *Sermons on Religion*, a work Novalis thought highly of. But it is impossible to think that Schleiermacher, for all his well-deserved distinction, could ever fit the tremendous image of inspiration associated with Novalis's "angelic herald," and it is additionally ironic that some should emphasize that identification when one considers that Schleiermacher was among those who rejected Novalis's essay for publication. Soon after this rejection, the whole Jena circle began to fall apart: "it was not long afterward that their whole covenant was shattered and the flock was dispersed. Within three years not a single one of them was left at Jena." (Friedrich Hiebel, *Novalis*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1954, p.98).

Novalis envisages ideally as our conscious immersion once again in that realm. This will be the reward of our union with Christ while we have been here, union with Whom has already come to Novalis in an extraordinarily complete way. His breaking through the confines of his own tragic condition has been in Christ's own terms: "Free from the tomb emerges/Love," and his own experience of this love is now Novalis's firm possession: "[t]he sense in love abiding/Grows clearer and more strong." From here Novalis can intuit all the rest: how there will come a time when this Day world, by the transformations such Love will accomplish, will be finally re-integrated into the otherworldly realm of Night where the source of Love resides. The end of this poem, and this Hymn, is written as if Novalis could already project himself into that end-world, could see himself coming into it again, as a consequence of the force of his recent vision. Thus are *we* projected back into that original "sea" of motherly waters out of which our Day world was thrown out; we are projected/projected back into that all-illuminating "sun" that once radiated out from the midst of those waters as the one eternal object of human adoration in that Paradisal time of old:

*To the marriage Death doth call;*
*No virgin holdeth back;*
*The lamps burn lustrous all;*
*Of oil there is no lack.*
*Would thy far feet were walking*
*The echoes of our street!*
*And that the stars were making*
*Signal with voices sweet.*
*To thee, O Mother maiden*
*Ten thousand hearts aspire;*
*In this life, sorrow-laden,*
*Thee only they desire.*
*In thee they hope for healing;*
*In thee expect true rest.*
*When thou, their safety sealing,*
*Shall clasp them to thy breast.*
*Courage! For life is striding*
*To endless life along;*
*The sense in love abiding,*
*Grows clearer and more strong.*
*One day the stars down dripping,*

*Shall flow in golden wine:*
*We of that nectar sipping,*
*As living stars will shine.*
*Free, from the tomb emerges*
*Love, to die never more;*
*Fulfilled, life heaves and surges*
*A sea without a shore.*
*All night! All blissful leisure!*
*One jubilating ode!*
*And the sun of all our pleasure*
*The countenance of God.*

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## *A Further Note on the Figure of the "Brother" in Novalis's Christendom or Europe*

In my text above, I called our attention to a "brother" of whom, in his essay, *Christendom or Europe*, Novalis says that he is "the heartbeat" of a "new age" into which the world was coming already in the last years of the 18th century. The background to these developments is our knowledge of the gradual approach to earth from distant heavens of the Heavenly Sophia who towards the end of the 18th century had entered the sphere of the Zodiac, radiating from there a sudden new influence into human affairs.[96] That new influence is duly reflected in the details of Novalis's presentation where he announces that this "brother," as an intermediary in this event, has made "*a new veil* for the Holy Virgin". This "veil" is further described as "what the spirit is for the body, [the Holy Virgin's] indispensable instrument whose folds are the letters of her sweet Annunciation." The ongoing presence of the Virgin Mary in our human sphere, i.e., her present "body," was thereby endowed with a still greater "spirit" of influence, making possible a new level and form of universal knowledge that is to take us yet another step forward in our cosmic-historical evolution. Of this "veil," which Novalis presents as the Virgin's new "instrument," he says that it is a "music of numbers," invoking with that reference a body of work on which he himself had been bent for some time in his *General Draft* or *Notes for an*

[96] See Robert Powell's lead article in the Easter 2020 issue of the *Starlight Journal* entitled "Stages in the Incarnation of Sophia" at https://sophiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Starlight-Easter-2020-issue-99p.pdf

*Encyclopedia*. The principal feature of this work is a new "science of the whole" informing all human endeavor, in every sphere of art and science, and whose basis, as *Christendom* proclaims, is shown to be the great unifying ideal, known in the pre-Reformation past and now resurrecting, of the universal Christian religion, for no understanding of the present moment was possible, according to Novalis, without our closer familiarity with the ongoing history and evolutionary fortunes of that religion.[97] This "music of numbers" is what, in this new age, the Virgin is now said to be "singing," a "singing" that is otherwise described as the "mighty beating of the wings of an angelic herald who is passing," this "herald" being none other than this same informing "brother" who, apart from the Virgin, is the only other focus in this section of Novalis's essay.

I will leave it to readers to explore for themselves in what Novalis's "science of the whole," which is to say his elaborate new program for the unity of religion, art, and science, consists, or indeed how this prepares the form in which a unity of the same initiation-sort comes forth in Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophy.[98] My purpose here is merely to add a note by way of further elucidation of what I have already presented on the subject of Novalis's "brother." From his highly emphatic association with "singing" in *Christendom*, clearly this "brother" is none other than that very "singer" who is said to be "passing" through the scene of Novalis's *Hymns to the Night*, and whose informing role and impact are now being viewed at this later time in history. In *Hymns to the Night* this "singer" is described as follows: "From a far shore came a singer, born under the sky of Hellas, to Palestine, and gave up his whole heart to the marvellous child"[99]. Subsequently, "[f]illed with joy, the singer went on to Indostan, his heart intoxicated with the sweetest love, and poured it out in fiery songs under that tender sky, so that a thousand hearts bowed to him, and the good news sprang up with a thousand branches."[100]

Modern scholars of the *Hymns* have seen in this singer "an embodiment of the poetic genius of the Greeks"[101] representing "the whole body of poetry which, having its origin in Greek antiquity, then embraced the imagery and the mythology of Christianity to bring religious

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[97] A "science of the whole" is my own description of Novalis's project—from my book, *The Way of Novalis*, HcP Ottawa, 2014, p.94.

[98] For an account of Novalis's influence on the development of Anthroposophy specifically in regard to a "new spiritual synthesis of religion, art and science," see Sergei Prokofieff, *Eternal Individuality*, Temple Lodge, 1992, 135*passim*.

[99] '*Hymns to the Night' and 'Spiritual Songs*', tr. George Macdonald, cited in n.61, p.47. Hellas=Greece.

[100] '*Hymns to the Night*,' Macdonald, p. 49.

[101] '*Hymns to the Night' and other Selected Writings*, tr., Charles Passage, New York: The Liberal Arts Press, p. xii.

understanding to the world."[102] In *anthroposophical* literature, Novalis's "singer" has been specifically identified as "the Spirit of exoteric Christianity,"[103] he who was "originally the ruling Archangel of the people of ancient Greece" and who, having fulfilled his mission in this respect, "was able to ascend to the rank of Archai and become the ruling spirit of the entire epoch"[104]; he thereby was further able "to participate in quite a special way in the events of Palestine and in the spreading of Christianity." Additionally, "at the time of the events of Palestine, he won the opportunity to rise from the rank of Time-Spirit [an Archai] to that of a Spirit of Form [an Exusiai]"; however at that time, he "renounced the possibility," to become, rather, "the representative guiding Spirit of exoteric Christianity."[105] Thus the further reference in the *Hymns* to this overriding Spirit bringing about "the spreading of exoteric Christianity over the entire Earth, even to its most distant regions (Hindustan)."[106]

We understand, further, that it is this very Spirit who had worked as a direct inspiration on both John the Baptist and Raphael, that is, on the Individuality we know as Novalis in his former incarnations. The question as to just how the world of Greece can have re-appeared in the Christian world through Raphael, since as John the Baptist he had been so hostile to the pagan world around him, is explained by the fact that the soul of John works together with this Spirit after his death.[107] For the mission of this Spirit consisted precisely in "harmoniously uniting the cultural impulses of Rome, Judaism, and Greece (which formed the sheaths for the arising of Christianity)"—a task with which Raphael was permeated "to the very depths of his soul."[108] Thus we arrive, at last, at a comprehensive understanding of Novalis's figure of the singer "through the knowledge that the forces of the mighty Archai who was the guiding Spirit of exoteric Christianity worked through John the Baptist, then like an echo through Raphael, and also through Novalis."[109] All this finds its reflection both in the "singer" who appears in Novalis's *Hymns* **and** the "brother" in *Christendom*, who are one and the same. Moreover, we are now in the position to understand this single figure's further identification in *Christendom* as "an angelic herald," for he belongs (in his own high degree) generically to the sphere of "angels," as a purely

[102] Margaret Mahoney Stoljar, *Athenaeum: A Critical Commentary*, cited in n.92, p.139.
[103] *Eternal Individuality*, cited in n.98, p.79.
[104] *Ibid.*, p.14.
[105] *Ibid.*, p.15.
[106] *Ibid.*, p.79.
[107] *Ibid.,* pp.33-34.
[108] *Ibid.,* pp.33-34.
[109] *Ibid.*, pp.78-79.

transcendent Spirit who was otherwise intimately implicated in the most pressing human developments of Novalis's time.[110]

There is a remarkable parallel between the long history of this ubiquitous and versatile Spirit who overrides several ages— from Greek antiquity right through the Christian Renaissance—and that most remarkable series of three paintings by Raphael that appear together in the *Stanza della Segnatura*: the *Parnassus*, the *School of Athens*, and the *Disputà*. I turn to these paintings now, to focus on the one figure who by his presence is foregrounded more than the rest, and who runs through each of these paintings like a thread. In the *Parnassus* this figure comes forth from the edge of the painting on the right as if to signal with his outstretched hand the greater developments that have yet to take place beyond the strict confines of the world depicted in that painting, which is set far back in Greek antiquity. In the *School of Athens* (which takes us forward in time[111]), this figure is passing through now in an ethereal white robe, on the left, to appear yet again in the *Disputà* still in motion, still looking like his former self in the *School*, in the bottom left part of that painting where he points emphatically to the Blessed Sacrament.

*Parnassus*

*School of Athens*

*Disputà*

[110] Thus Novalis could not have had in mind by the "brother" the contemporary theologian Schleiermacher, as some have supposed. See n.95 above.

[111] See my "Further Clarifications" below for more on the historical scheme of these paintings.

What I wish more specifically to propose in this note is that in the case of each of these representations we are dealing with a reflection in Raphael's artistic consciousness of this one and the same figure who plays so large a role in the mission of the Baptist-Raphael-Novalis Individuality. This figure, we have come to know, is the Spirit who appears originally as the ruling Archangel of the people of ancient Greece and who transforms at the time of the event of Christ into the Spirit of exoteric Christianity to cast his influence far into the Christian age. When *Novalis*, for his part, was in the process of presenting *his* singer and angel-brother, who is also seen as "passing" through, it appears he was himself noting, by way of artistic reflection, the great ongoing influence of this Spirit in his own time and in his own spiritual-artistic destiny at that time. Conceiving of the matter in this way, we see how Novalis's own elaborate account of this figure could be said to constitute the next or a fourth picture in the series that was artistically initiated by Raphael (i.e., Novalis in his former incarnation). In the meantime we have moved along from an image created by painting in the case of Raphael to one created by the word in the case of Novalis.

Now the further question arises as to how this great Spirit of exoteric Christianity will have influenced human evolution *since* the time of Novalis. On this score, anthroposophical literature has been to this point silent, but as this Spirit of exoteric Christianity has been so emphatically working over so long a period of time, it will be doubted whether he is not still working today and will continue to do so. And we find, indeed, that he *is* working today, in the revelatory, pioneering work and mission of Robert Powell, something of this Spirit's influence being conveyed, for example, in a recent article by Powell: "The Eucharist and the Mass of the Lamb and his Bride."[112] For more on Robert Powell's contributions along these lines, conducted in association with the Sophia Foundation of North America, see https://sophiafoundation.org/portfolio/sophia-grail-circle-liturgy-ritual/ and https://sophiafoundation.org/portfolio/grail-facilitator-training/. See also Powell's major study on Novalis, *Elijah Come Again*, Great Barrington, Massachusetts: SteinerBooks, 2009. The crucial link for *us* (as students of the Masters) are the words Novalis uses to describe the accomplishment of this Spirit of exoteric Christianity in his time:

> ***He has made a new veil for the Holy Virgin …whose folds are the letters of her sweet Annunciation, the infinite play of the folds … a music of numbers… her singing … the ceremonial call to a new foundation gathering…***
>
> **(from *Christendom, or Europe*)**

[112] In the Easter 2020 issue, cited in n.96 above.

This accomplishment was mediated at the time by Novalis himself in his life-work, and it will be found that the same holds true of Robert Powell in his life-work in our own time. For more from me on this line of succession, see the further write-up on Robert Powell's life-work on my author website page at http://johnomeara.squarespace.com/riddle (see the second half of that page). [Reproduced in this collection as Endnote 2 to the chapter in Part I—Ed.]

## Further Clarifications

What the viewer will note as historical anomalies in the time-frame of *Parnassus* and that of the *School of Athens* are explained by the fact that Raphael is looking back on these scenes from his own position in time, and from the point of view generally, in all three paintings, of a historical continuum. Thus notwithstanding that Raphael populates the *Parnassus* also with personages that take us into the Roman age around the time of Christ (Horace and Ovid, for example) and indeed even into the Middle Ages (in the case of Petrarch and Dante), the principal setting of the painting is that of a mythical antiquity that goes back as far as the Greek God Apollo and his Muses, in contrast with the later, more humanly-centred, philosophical time of the *School of Athens* (a School primarily associated with the later figures of Plato and Aristotle, circa the 4th century BC). In each of these paintings there appear figures who straddle the two times because Raphael is summarizing the full historical achievement as he goes along (in poetry, in the case of *Parnassus*, and philosophy, in the *School of Athens*), in the case of the *School of Athens* to the point of accommodating the presence of many of his own contemporaries and even himself. Localizing categories are more easily applied to the *Disputa* (which centres on theology), since this painting is very clearly post-Christian (leaving the Greek world behind, though it does reach back into the Old Testament, to figures like Adam, Moses, and Jacob); the painting is otherwise to a great extent oriented towards a later period in Christian history that again takes us up to the time of Raphael. That the symbolizing figure I have been isolating in Raphael's three paintings is made or thought to represent a historical personage—in the case of *Parnassus*, e.g., Horace, and in the case of *School*, the Greek philosopher, Hypatia or alternatively Raphael's contemporary, Maria della Rovere—does not conflict with our understanding that this figure serves at the same time as a *reflection* of the presence of the Spirit who was once the guiding Spirit of the Greeks and later of exoteric Christianity. Properly speaking, what we have in this figure is a *reflection* of the presence of this Spirit, not its representation, an artistic reflection of this Spirit that is more or less unconsciously intended by Raphael, and that would appear to have taken a more expressly conscious form in the case of

Novalis. It is even possible that this Spirit may have been "seen" by Novalis in a direct act of vision, if, that is, we are to trust our translator's rendering of the famous passage from the 4th Song from Novalis's *Spiritual Songs*, which presents the figure standing hand in hand with Christ in Novalis's vision as the very "brother" in question, this experience involving for Novalis an enveloping mystery that was not to be simply bruited out to the world:

> *Whom I saw, and who the other,*
> *Ask me not, or friend or brother!—*
> *Sight seen once and evermore!*
> *Lone in all life's eves and morrows,*
> *This hour only, like my sorrows,*
> *Ever shines my eyes before.*[113]

[113] '*Hymns to the Night' and 'Spiritual Songs,*' tr., George Macdonald, p. 96.

# PART III

# *Shakespeare's Initiation-Drama in the Light of the Romantic Evolutionary Thought of Rudolf Steiner*

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My main account of Shakespeare's tremendous personal evolution as evidenced in developments linking his mature tragedies to his late plays appeared in my monograph, *Othello's Sacrifice*, published in 1996. The late plays concerned were *Pericles*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*. This account was written in the spring of 1994, and in the fall of that year and over the two years that followed I put together *The Thinking Spirit: Rudolf Steiner and Romantic Theory, A Collection of Texts with Notes*.[114] My first purpose in assembling this book was to introduce my literary-academic readers, for what was very likely the first time in their careers, to the spiritual-scientific thought of Rudolf Steiner, because this thought had served as the basis of my approach to Shakespeare's late evolution. Readers of *Othello's Sacrifice* had been offered a history of Romantic and post-Romantic criticism of Shakespeare as the most illustrious form of approach to Shakespearean tragedy in our time, which criticism, because of its theoretically unelaborated assumptions, could yet only fall short of properly accounting for the essential direction of Shakespeare's experience in his tragedies. This was a criticism that *eschewed* tragedy in order to apotheosize either the noble 'hero' on the one hand, or a greater principle of 'life' that already condemns the hero's direction in tragedy on the other. The spiritual-scientific thought of Rudolf Steiner offered a solution to this impasse by offering a basis for understanding how and *at what level* Shakespeare was, in fact, bent on living *through* human tragedy, in all its repercussions, with the result that he finally arrives at the profound forms of higher human evolutionary life-experience that we find magically represented in his late plays.

My purpose with *The Thinking Spirit* was to show first that Rudolf Steiner, for all of his association with the occult world, which would otherwise have been well-known to my more informed readers, himself emerges out of the tradition of Romantic thought. Not only does he do so explicitly, in his well-known association with the thought of Goethe, but also—through

[114] *The Thinking Spirit: Rudolf Steiner and Romantic Theory, A Collection of Texts with Notes*, Lincoln, NE, 2007 is available through Amazon.com. All page references for *Othello's Sacrifice* as well as for *Prospero's Powers* are, for convenience, from my main book on Shakespeare where these monographs are re-printed: see *Remembering Shakespeare: The Scope of His Achievement from 'Hamlet' through 'The Tempest,'* Toronto, 2016, downloadable at https://www.academia.edu/37420201/Remembering_Shakespeare_The_Scope_of_His_Achievement_from_Hamlet_through_The_Tempest. The relevant pages in *Othello's Sacrifice* run from 114-151.

his further less known *critique* of Goethe—in a way that associates him implicitly with S.T. Coleridge, with whom he has, in fact, the closest affinity of any Romantic thinker before him, even if Steiner would not appear to have indicated any cognizance of Coleridge let alone of that aspect of Coleridge's thought that fits his own without qualification.

Hence the breakdown of Steiner's thought in my book into two parts: "The Living Principle of Knowledge" and "The Process of our Own Self-Consciousness," the two most famous phrases from Coleridge's theory of the nature and genesis of the Imagination, as these appear in Chapters 12 and 13 of his *Biographia Literaria*.

This deeper unknown, and at best unconscious, association with the thought of Coleridge points to what we are bound to see is a universal property of the form of evolutionary life and thought we find championed in both thinkers, and it is specifically this form of life and thought that is acted on by Shakespeare in his own literary output. That this is so finally makes of *him* a *prototypic* Romantic, even if the actual terms of his own evolution were, of course, grounded in the philosophical elaborations of his own time.

To explain the terms of this evolutionary life and thought:

"The living principle of knowledge" invokes a form of consciousness that is based in a direct experience of the creation forces that underlie Nature's production, and from which alone all genuine knowledge of Nature derives.

"The process of our own self-consciousness" is an *additional* process of consciousness that is further brought into action within one's experience of those creation forces, in the interaction with which, and their further development which follows from this interaction, one puts oneself in the position to evolve consciousness into higher evolutionary forms of spiritual-imaginative life.

"Imagination" is a first form of such a higher life of consciousness. Steiner was in the position, from an additional training to speak, as Coleridge could not, of still higher forms of consciousness which he denominated "Inspiration," and "Intuition."

I make it very clear in *Othello's Sacrifice* that *Pericles* is the play in which Shakespeare brings us into the world of Imagination, *The Winter's Tale* the play in which he brings us into the world of Inspiration, *The Tempest* the play in which Shakespeare brings us into the world of Intuition.

Precisely what this additional spiritual training of Steiner's of which I speak consists in, and on the basis of what form of idea of knowledge it is a development, is just what *The Thinking Spirit* was intended to present systematically.

My working assumption was otherwise to point the reader to an area of consciousness in the experience of Nature (in the advanced form I have just outlined) that I was arguing Shakespeare himself would have worked in in order to be able to come through at last into the higher spiritual-imaginative life symbolically represented and indeed infinitely suggested in his late plays.

The application of this higher 'theoretical' presentation back to Shakespeare was, as a matter of fact, a main concern of mine in putting *The Thinking Spirit* together, but of course, this presentation would have necessarily to assume an interest in its own right, among other things as an account of the tremendous reach of the experience of Rudolf Steiner as the quintessential Romantic of our time, of whom very little was then known to my readers. Perhaps inevitably the application back to Shakespeare ended up being more or less a tacit emphasis, developed in a couple of significant footnotes to the collection, but as an allusive text; it was not otherwise brought forward to the extent that I feel would have been necessary to make the associations back to my presentation in *Othello's Sacrifice* more coherent.[115] I was a little too cavalierly assuming that readers fresh from *Sacrifice* would have been already sustained by the presentation in that book enough to see for themselves the application back to Shakespeare's production from my presentation in *The Thinking Spirit*. "Fresh" in a manner of speaking, for *Spirit* would not be published for the first time until the year 2000. What's more, it appeared in print for a second time in the year 2007, but also at that time without my giving thought to shoring up the presentation along the present lines. The following is intended to help fill in the gaps that remained.

II

The primal issue that arises from the presentation I offer in *Othello's Sacrifice* is precisely how Shakespeare could have emerged from the extreme depths of his experience of tragic helplessness and tragic hopelessness *by the very process of that experience* at last into that brilliant, magical, otherworldly sphere of consciousness that is reflected to us in his late plays and that is finally fully his. For that is what I was able to trace out as the experience he would have had, from my in-depth structural analysis of the dramatic elements that relate the late plays back to the world of his tragedies to which he'd been so fully given and in which for a time he would appear indeed to have lost himself.

With that, what I realized is that what Shakespeare went through could only finally be explained in our own post-Romantic terms on the basis of what Rudolf Steiner presents as the

[115] These footnote-references back to *Sacrifice* appear in *The Thinking Spirit* on p.96 and p.113.

precise form of evolutionary development of consciousness that it is possible to access today as a result of devotion to the strict training in world-experience, and the thinking that objectively supports this, that he outlines with minute care especially in the first 30 years of his writing career.

My understanding in proceeding to put together *The Thinking Spirit* was that Shakespeare would have been through a process of the evolutionary development of consciousness closely *analogous* to that set forth by Steiner in our time, which he alone indeed has fully theorized in the post-Romantic era.

Steiner had his specific terms for elaborating his account that were natural to this time; they are to a significant extent based in the tradition of Romantic philosophical experience. Shakespeare, naturally, had his experience in the specific terms of his time, which I have shown arose out of the Rosicrucian-alchemical tradition of that time, as I elaborate the matter in *Prospero's Powers*, my monograph study that followed on *Sacrifice* and completes my presentation in that former book. Even so, it does not *necessarily* follow that Shakespeare took himself formally through any such Rosicrucian-alchemical training, only that, having had the experience for himself, however he will have had it, whether by grace or by an inborn destiny, he found in the Rosicrucian-alchemical culture of his time a useful symbolic basis for conveying what his experience had been about.

My faithful readers, having taken themselves through my presentation in *Sacrifice*, I assumed would quite naturally see the analogous application back from Steiner's account to what had been Shakespeare's very similar experience. This was my thought when *Spirit* was first put together. To some extent I supported the analogy with a couple of notes that pointed out the retrograde application to what I present of Shakespeare's experience in *Sacrifice*. Devoted and conscientious readers could at those junctures have gone back momentarily to re-read the relevant portions of *Sacrifice* to which I was referring them in the notes. They would then have been re-reading my presentation in *Sacrifice* in parallel relationship to my Steiner presentation, and would in this way have noted all the more immediately how Shakespeare's progression through tragedy into the triumphing otherworldly experience of the late plays follows the same universal pattern as Steiner was depicting in his systematic account of how one emerges into the worlds of imagination, inspiration, and intuition. No doubt, that was a lot to ask of my readers. The focus of my presentation had, in the meantime, shifted almost entirely from Shakespeare to Steiner.

In my second and final note that refers the reader back to Shakespeare[116], I quote Steiner on the experience that cannot be eschewed and is indeed all-important in the evolution in consciousness he describes, namely that one passes without mitigation through a most terrible "upheaval" in the soul, an "inner shattering" that is accompanied by "fear… anxiety…horror," this experience being no less that of Shakespeare when immersed in the productive life of his tragic creation, especially in *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*. In Shakespeare's time, this would have been seen as an experience of a fundamental "depravity" in human nature that could never have been ignored. What follows from this experience for Shakespeare, as I depict this in *Sacrifice*, bears an exact analogous relationship to what in this same section of *The Thinking Spirit* I show Steiner presents in his work of a *further* evolution in consciousness that is yet possible arising from this same point of immersion in one's experience of essential human tragedy.

Looking back, I can only wish that I had referred the reader further and more explicitly to how matters developed with Shakespeare from here as reflected in the symbolic dramatic situations of *Pericles*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*. In a way that is only possible for a specially evolving being who is having this experience in alignment with a specific form of extension of self-consciousness, and whatever the actual source may have been for him—there emerges for Shakespeare now the image of a new-born self arising from the very depths of his complete immersion in tragedy, as depicted in the scene of recognition between Pericles and Marina (in Act 5 scene 1). What Steiner describes of the initiate's experience at this point precisely encapsulates the import of Pericles's act of self-recognition in this scene, as at last Marina stands magnificently before him. As Steiner puts it:

> *He has to direct and lead with his new-born self what he is in his ordinary self and which appears to him in an image.*[117]

Shakespeare transmits this experience of his *to us* in the reflected symbolic form of the image of Marina, at her meeting with Pericles to whom she appears as his Higher Self come through the tragedy. As I put it in *Sacrifice* (138):

> *At this stage of the 'progress,' the suffering Ego has recognized, and is uniting with, a higher aspect in itself which, though perfectly sensitive to suffering, is yet insusceptible to despair.*

As Pericles puts it, in his own terms:

> *… yet thou dost look*
> *Like Patience gazing on kings' graves and smiling*

[116] On p.113 of *The Thinking Spirit*.
[117] *The Thinking Spirit*, 113.

*Extremity out of act.*

*O come hither,*
*Thou that beget'st him that did thee beget*

In the initiate's developing experience the moment of great "upheaval" in his soul is associated with the appearance of a Being or Guardian Who bears the additional message of the need for self-ennoblement in the terms just described:

> *A truly terrible, spectral Being confronts the pupil* … [but] *however terrible the form assumed by the Guardian, it is only the effect of the pupil's past life, only his own character awakened into independent existence outside himself.*

For the "pupil's past life," one reads, in the context of Shakespeare's experience, all the cumulative effects of his complete immersion in deepest human tragedy over years, which would have come to a head for him thus or in a similar fashion:

> *The aim of the pupil's preparation must be to enable him to endure the terrible sight without a trace of timidity, and at the moment of the meeting to feel his strength so increased that he can consciously undertake to make himself responsible for the ennoblement of the Guardian.*[118]

For "the ennoblement of the Guardian," read Shakespeare's ennoblement of himself. Steiner reminds us that it is only the "higher training"—in our analogy Shakespeare's own, whatever form this would have taken with him—that makes this specific experience of self-ennoblement at all "possible." Steiner remarks further that, among other things, the evolution from the tragic experience into higher consciousness can also be a relatively fluid or more peacefully coordinated process as the result of an especially meticulous formal training in systematic thought:

> *Indeed the training can have such a harmonious effect that entry into the new life is freed from any agitating or tumultuous effects.*[119]

This, as it happens, was the case, though still only relatively so, as I comment in my footnote to Steiner's remark[120], with Novalis, but I cannot believe this was the case with Shakespeare, on the basis of all that he presents in his tragedies, which takes us far and away beyond even what Novalis took himself through, extraordinarily painful as the latter's experience was

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[118] *The Thinking Spirit*, 112. See also 113n.31, wherein reference is made to my presentation, in *Othello's Sacrifice*, of this same archetypal experience, which I there explicitly attribute to Shakespeare.
[119] *The Thinking Spirit*, 114.
[120] See n.32 on p.114.

otherwise.[121] (I make the point above (on p.16) that Shakespeare's more comprehensive experience lays the ground for Novalis's later one in the specialized evolutionary sense invoked in that context, but this is hardly to minimize the profound depth of Novalis's own painful progression in evolutionary consciousness which has its own unique significance as itself a new achievement farther along in time.[122])

*Pericles* marks the point in Shakespeare's development in consciousness at which he enters the world of Imagination in the Romantic sense of coming into an experience of his Higher Self. This is the first world into which one penetrates in a development of higher consciousness. In the next passages I record in the last few pages of *The Thinking Spirit*, as I show, Steiner speaks of access to yet a **second** world in which it becomes possible now to read "the signs of an occult script" that "correspond to the forces actively working in the world"[123]—"in the world," mediately, of course, through Nature. At this level "a systematic understanding" of these forces becomes possible, as a result of which the initiate, become a "pupil" of these forces, can perform "actions"[124] that build knowingly on these forces in a way that systematically furthers the higher evolutionary work of Nature. This second level of experience in the higher consciousness is symbolically reflected to us in *The Winter's Tale*, in the sublimely august figure of Perdita of whom it is broadcast, in what must be regarded as the play's most impressive speech, that:

> *What you do*
> *Still betters what is done. When you speak, sweet.*
> *I'ld have you do it ever: when you sing,*
> *I'ld have you buy and sell so, so give alms,*
> *Pray so; and, for the ordering your affairs,*
> *To sing them too: when you do dance, I wish you*
> *A wave o' the sea, that you might ever do*
> *Nothing but that; move still, still so,*
> *And own no other function: each your doing,*
> *So singular in each particular,*

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[121] As described in Endnote 1 of Part I.

[122] I also make the point above (on p.15) that the terms of Novalis's progression in evolutionary consciousness, as they would, likewise coincide, like those in Shakespeare's case, with Steiner's elaborations on the nature of such an experience as these are brought forth in *The Thinking Spirit*. In that passage above, I offer the relevant references back to *The Thinking Spirit* in Novalis's case.

[123] *The Thinking Spirit*, 114.

[124] *The Thinking Spirit*, 115.

*Crowns what you are doing in the present deed,*
*That all your* ***acts*** *are queens.*

As I comment in *Sacrifice* (142):

> *… we notice, with new developments in 'The Winter's Tale,' a corresponding extension of the operation of the* ***Imaginative*** *Soul to a point inside 'great creating Nature' (IV.iv.88) where a great* ***Inspirational*** *order is now revealed. Here we reach the realm of* ***systematic*** *Imagination—of regenerative, evolutionary creation—where a higher life is constantly being re-created out of death.*

—the 'death' that, in this case, corresponds to what has been Shakespeare's complete immersion in tragedy to that point.

It is not my purpose here to further substantiate or repeat the elaborate presentation I make in *Sacrifice* as to the dramatic grounds for speaking of a further evolution in consciousness in Shakespeare, as reflected in the late plays. My purpose here is simply to alert the reader to the close, parallel relationship that was intended between my presentation in *Sacrifice* and Steiner's detailed account of how one carefully prepares and gets to know and progress through the higher worlds. My aim was to help fill in a sense of what the basis of Shakespeare's evolution in consciousness *would have been like*, with reference this time to a full presentation of the very carefully elaborated heuristic thought of Steiner in this regard. This parallel retrograde application, while intended, will not necessarily have been grasped by readers or will perhaps have been forgotten by them as they wade through all the details presented in *Spirit* where the focus has shifted theoretically to a later post-Romantic time. The application back to *Sacrifice* was immediately alluded to on the very first page of my 'Preface' to *Spirit*, but readers would have to have persisted in that application throughout their reading of *Spirit*. Several more footnotes would have been needed to help keep this application clearly before my readers' minds, and the absence of these can only be regretted. Especially so as one nears the end of the argument in *Spirit* where such a parallel as I am pointing out here could have been made explicit. Alas, there was all the more reason to emphasize the application back when *Spirit* appeared in print again more than a decade after *Sacrifice*. But this intervention did not take place even then.

Suffice it here to re-emphasize, finally, that the **third** world into which one enters in a higher development of consciousness—described by Steiner as the world of Intuition—corresponds to the powers represented between Prospero and Miranda in *The Tempest*. Steiner accounts for that further and final evolution as follows: in this third world

> *… the candidate … must find his 'higher self' in the truest sense of the word … must instantly decide to listen in all things to the inspiration of the spirit … the candidate learns how to* ***apply*** *the occult teaching, how to place it in the service of humanity.*[125]

As I explain in *Sacrifice (143)*, with specific reference given there to the experience Prospero has of himself:

> *As Steiner reminds us, Intuition means 'dwelling in God'.*[126] *Hence the focus here on a concentration of power in the individual 'I' insofar as it finally comes to dwell within the 'I' of God.*

Thus 'self-ennoblement,' 'acts,' 'service to humanity': Pericles and Marina, Perdita, Prospero/Miranda: *Pericles*, *The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest*. Behind these three terms are in an inexhaustible elaboration of factors comprising the three higher worlds they invoke. Of these one begins to get a glimpse in the greatly extensive accounts of Rudolf Steiner to this effect in strenuous work undertaken over four full decades.

Unquestionably the most crucial concept in any understanding of such an evolution in consciousness as I have been describing here is that of "dissolution" in the precise sense in which Coleridge develops this in the *Biographia Literaria*. It is, in the end, the central concept brought forward in *The Thinking Spirit* where an exact coincidence of thought between Steiner and Coleridge is established in this regard. I elaborate on the concept further, and in still greater detail, in the copious notes that accompany their presentations. In short, starting from our experience of the objective world as we see this before us, there can be no possibility of any authentic knowledge of this world without our proceeding to "dissolve" our first relationship to it, which is naturally one of an "identity" between ourselves as subject and the world as object. This separation of ourselves from our experience is the beginning of the process of self-consciousness as such, there following upon this, *if only one persists further* in this process, inevitably the creation of a new and higher identity in one's experience of the world which Coleridge denominated the Imagination. This further experience coincides with the opening of a first *other* world which it was the pre-eminent achievement of the Romantic genius to have penetrated:

> *Bearing then this in mind, that intelligence is a self-development … we may abstract … and … reduce it to kind, under the idea of an indestructible power with two opposite and counteracting forces …*

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[125] *The Thinking Spirit*, 116.

[126] Here I quote Steiner from his lectures on the Gospel of St. Luke.

> *The intelligence in the one tends to* ***objectize*** *itself, and in the other to* ***know*** *itself in the object …*
>
> *I assume such a power as my principle, in order to deduce from it … the nature and genesis of the imagination …*
>
> *The imagination I consider as co-existing with the conscious will … It* ***dissolves****, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create …*
>
> *Again, the spirit (originally the identity of object and subject) must in some sense* ***dissolve*** *this identity, in order to be conscious of it … this implies an act, and it follows therefore that intelligence or self-consciousness is impossible except by and in a will … and freedom must be assumed as a* ***ground*** *of philosophy and can never be deduced from it …*[127]

It was Steiner's own supreme achievement to show that on the basis of this *same* process of dissolution and fresh expansion pursued *further*, the possibility emerges of evolving from a first other world of the Imagination into yet another, second world of Inspiration, and yet again, with a repetition of the same process on this second level, entry into a third world of Intuition. As I put it in one of my notes: "From this we may infer that progress or 'expansion' in spiritual vision is the result of a continuous *series* of acts of 'dissolution' or 'extinction': extensive acts of 'will' in Coleridge's sense." (96n.20). This all-governing process is experienced by Coleridge's and Steiner's faithful thinker, as indicated in another note, as nothing other than a continuous "re-engendering of the creative activity of the world that lies within him as potential" (106n.24).

The concept of "dissolution" grasped in this specific context is undoubtedly the most important one one could have in attempting to understand how Shakespeare could have gone from one such world into another as demonstrated in symbolic fashion in that series of his late plays that begins with *Pericles* and continues with *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*. In fact, the whole process is precisely what Prospero reflects back to us in his tremendous experience at 'sea,' as I was to show later in *Prospero's Powers* (165), the monograph that followed on *Sacrifice*:

> *The process of expansion is clinched for Prospero when he is finally cast out to 'sea': "****transported*** *… in secret studies" already implies this further development. There, as we have seen, Prospero experiences those successive transformations of his consciousness for which he has prepared.*

Reflected to us, stupendously, in this moment are those "successive transformations of his consciousness" that Shakespeare had himself experienced and that constitute the actual grounds and basis of the whole presentation we are given across these late plays.

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[127] See *The Thinking Spirit*, 68-69.

In seeking to offer an understanding of this experience into which Shakespeare at last came so sublimely, what I had to present of Steiner's thought, especially in its coincidence with the thought of Coleridge, served not only as a further elucidation but an essential and indispensable one.

And the present essay, which I have felt compelled to offer (coming out of retirement), is a way of insisting that *The Thinking Spirit* is as crucial to our understanding of what Shakespeare's experience would have been as is the symbolic dramatic framework in which he reflects all this to us which I had duly analyzed and elaborated in *Othello's Sacrifice*. The present essay has been a way of making up, if this can be still possible, for failing to bring home the point with more emphasis at the time both works were written, which is almost thirty years ago now…

## By Way of Explanation

My main account of Shakespeare's evolution through the tragedies into the late plays, as indicated above, appeared initially in the third part of *Othello's Sacrifice* (1996) and was built on further in *Prospero's Powers* (2007), both re-printed in my *Remembering Shakespeare* (2016). A second such account, intended for a more broadly general reader, appeared in *Shakespeare's Muse*, written in 2007 and also re-printed in *Remembering Shakespeare* by way of an Introduction.

# *Revisiting Owen Barfield's 'Romanticism Comes of Age': A Modern Tragedy*

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## Abstract

This paper emerged, somewhat unhappily, out of a critical re-viewing of Owen Barfield's *Romanticism Comes of Age*, a book that served me some thirty years ago as an indispensable way in to what I wished to say about Shakespeare's extraordinary passage from the 'great' tragedies (especially, *Othello* and *King Lear*) into his later 'romances' (notably, *Pericles*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*). (See *Othello's Sacrifice*, published in 1996 and later incorporated in *Remembering Shakespeare*, 2016, from p.120.)

Essential to my presentation at that time was what Barfield pointed out as "[Rudolf] Steiner's teaching of the three 'Souls' (Sentient Soul, Intellectual Soul, and Consciousness Soul), at once delicate and profound, accurate and inexhaustible,"—especially as this teaching bears on a fundamental and inalienable "evolution in consciousness" that takes place across these Souls *in historical time*, as humankind progresses from one epoch to the next and from one Soul into the other. Thus, by Shakespeare's day, it is the Consciousness Soul that has emerged, with the various and indeed harrowing challenges that are raised by its coming in relation to the now outgrown if still crucially surviving other Souls, Sentient, and Intellectual. (The reader is referred once again to p.vii of my Preface for an account of these terms.[128]) The six chapters that open Barfield's book, with their tight-knit presentation on the evolutionary history of these "Souls," strike me still, these many years later, as among the most extraordinary and inspired expositions in our time, bearing on what remain to this day necessary new ideas for literary and philosophical procedure in general. All the more reason, then, to appreciate Barfield's lament otherwise that he was not being listened to outside the anthroposophical culture out of which he addresses his reader. These chapters should have been sufficient to begin to win a larger readership over.

[128] Periods of long date and their carryovers into later times are involved: the *Sentient Soul* bearing originally on life in the period before 700 BC (going as far back as 2800 BC,); the *Intellectual Soul* life in the Classical-Medieval period, between 700 BC and 1400 AD; the *Consciousness Soul* in the Modern period that begins in 1400 AD and will continue until 3500 AD—all periods of approximately 2100 years.

But did Barfield properly manage his material beyond these chapters, when it came time to putting together his enlarged1966 edition of the book? There is evidence of a well-conceived editorial intervention in removing two of the three later chapters from his 1944 edition of his book which follow the illustrious 6—they are in different ways divagations from Barfield's main purposes to this point. But other serious problems were created by the sequence of chapters which now follow, which does not effect a proper transition from one part into the other, where a good number of more recondite elements of Steiner's teachings are taken up.

Nor are all the various shifts into Steiner's terminology in the later part of Barfield's book, of which a broader readership would know nothing, in many instances properly elucidated or fully accounted for. Speaking myself as an anthroposophist of many years, and also as a literary critic and editor, it is hard to think that the broader readership at which Barfield aimed, from among that "educated public"/the "lettered public" he otherwise so much valued, would not be dumbfounded by these later expositions. This failure would itself become part of the general tragedy of our time that Barfield pinpoints in a good number of sections of his book, when it comes to comprehending what our time cannot do without as for Steiner's teachings. A large part of the editorial problem Barfield was left with had to do with the fact that the expositions he offers in these essays were all intended for publication in the anthroposophical world where Steiner's teachings were well-known. In these expositions he was for the most part addressing an anthroposophical audience who were already there along with him in a more evolved experience of these teachings. Thus numerous other adjustments to these expositions would have been needed when he proceeded to make his work more available to the general public.

## The Breakdown

a)

*The sequence of chapters as they appear*
*in the original, shorter 1944 edition:*

*From East to West
*Thinking and Thought
*Speech, Reason and Imagination
*Of the Consciousness Soul
*The Form of *Hamlet*
*Of the Intellectual Soul
*The Inspiration of the *Divine Comedy*

*Coleridge's "I and Thou"
*The Philosophy of Samuel Taylor Coleridge

b)

*The sequence of chapters as presented in the 1966 edition,*
*on which I based myself in my work on Shakespeare:*

*From East to West
*Thinking and Thought
*Speech, Reason and Imagination
*On the Consciousness Soul
*The Form of Hamlet
*On the Intellectual Soul
*The Philosophy of Samuel Taylor Coleridge
*Goethe and the Twentieth Century
*The Time-Philosophy of Rudolf Steiner
*The Fall in Man and Nature
*Man, Thought and Nature
*Rudolf Steiner's Concept of Mind

The 1967 edition of the book, which the Wesleyan University Press proceeded to make available to a still broader audience, reproduces the 1966 edition without alteration.

## Remarks on Editings

(i)

Barfield did well to leave out the chapters on the *Divine Comedy* and Coleridge's "I and Thou" for this later edition. Along with "The Philosophy of Samuel Taylor Coleridge," the intention with these pieces in the original edition was clearly to fill out the volume, even if there are faint links in each back to the main exposition of the first 6 chapters. They have the value of being other pieces Barfield had also written in past years in the general area of a study of consciousness and on that basis were included.

But these three end-chapters have very much their own provenance and direction, relative to the previous 6.

"The Inspiration of the *Divine Comedy*" is basically an essay in practical criticism; it delves into the poem in considerable detail, far beyond the survey method of the previous 6 chapters. It as if Barfield was here fully explicating the *Comedy* to his anthroposophical audience, getting them to look into it with him a lot more closely and in greater depth, also with reference to a certain range of more abstruse conceptualizings about the imaginative process for which the non-anthroposophical reader has not been adequately prepared (as where B speaks of "the incorporation of the cosmic intelligence into the human being" that is happening in this period and that involves, as a necessary corollary, "a repetition or recapitulation in the soul of man of an event [having further to do with man's "Ego"] which had already taken place, without his conscious participation in Atlantis."—!)

"I and Thou" was, in its turn, an incidental review of another writer's book on Coleridge, published in a prominent mainstream literary journal of the time (T.S. Eliot's *New Criterion*). It points to Barfield's developing interest in Coleridge for his own sake such as came to fulfilment some 40 years later in *What Coleridge Thought*, in 1971…

(ii)

But at least one additional editorial move ought, I believe, to have been made at this point.

The book in the end falls into two parts. In the second part Barfield moves beyond his exposition on the evolutionary history of the 'Souls' into another large exposition on the theme of the still broader relationship between 'Man and Nature.' This theme will occupy Barfield for the rest of the collection.

The transition from the first part to the second would have been better served by "The Time-Philosophy of Rudolf Steiner"—which ought therefore to have been brought up and placed before "The Philosophy of Samuel Taylor Coleridge." The theme of Steiner's 'Time-Philosophy' serves as a useful recapitulation of the main basis for understanding the historical evolution of the 'Souls'—Barfield's focus in the first part, even as it constitutes what now becomes what in our time should be, according to him, our main consideration in seeking a proper understanding of the further relationship between 'Man and Nature,'—Barfield's focus in the second part (see Endnote at the end of this collection for an elaboration of this point[i]). "The Philosophy of Samuel Taylor Coleridge," with its new focus on the thought of man in relation to nature, falls more naturally into the presentation at this point as a more specific and more elaborately developed instance of the theme. There follows on this the specific case of Goethe, Coleridge and Goethe having been in the meantime yoked together in this venture, etc.

c)

*The sequence that was finally needed, as I see it:*

*From East to West
*Thinking and Thought
*Speech, Reason and Imagination
*On the Consciousness Soul
*The Form of Hamlet
*On the Intellectual Soul
*The Time-Philosophy of Rudolf Steiner
*The Philosophy of Samuel Taylor Coleridge
*Goethe and the Twentieth Century
*The Fall in Man and Nature
*Man, Thought and Nature
*Rudolf Steiner's Concept of Mind

*

## Outstanding Problems

Even so, serious problems of terminology remained in the volume's second part, when one approaches it from the point of view of that more broadly based "educated public" and its non-anthroposophical reader that Barfield so wanted to reach.

These problems begin to proliferate (in our new setting), from the end-section of "The Time-Philosophy" where Barfield suddenly invokes the idea of the "true substance" behind "the history of meaning," which he identifies as "none other than the Spiritual Hierarchies and their interweaving activity in the world of nature, in history, in the individual soul." No indication is given here as to who or what these Hierarchies are, or what their "interweaving" can consist of among themselves to start with, except to repeat that "the reality is everywhere a reality of Being. Whatsoever in it is not Being, is the activity which proceeds in the relation of one Being to another."

Later there is talk of "the one Being of the Hierarchies, to whom we can look for help" in linking microcosmic man and macrocosmic nature, who is eventually identified simply as "Michael"—one is left presuming the Archangel Michael—and who is said to have this role only by virtue of offering help "by way of gesture and example rather than by way of interference." What can this mean? Here Barfield is speaking, making allusions to greater realities and

conditions, strictly as an anthroposophist among anthroposophists, whom no one outside their experience could understand.

In the essay "The Fall in Man and Nature," Barfield with a similar (unexplained) gratuitousness invokes: "Lucifer's gift," "the Threshold" of the "Guardian," "Lucifer's help," "the Nathan Jesus," "the Spiritual Earth," "the sleeping and the waking poles of the being of man," again without elucidating these (for the layman) obviously remote and recondite realities; and in "Man, Thought, and Nature", similarly: the "etheric" and the "ethereal," "the human etheric body" etc., all of which have quite specific denotations in Steiner's teachings…

What these many unfamiliar and strange terms demanded was a series of Notes that would have gone into their provenance in Steiner and the cosmological background out of which they emerged, and why exactly there would be a necessity to access the insights that underly these terms in order to properly fathom the link between Man's nature and the greater, cosmic Nature that surrounds him. No such Notes were provided in all the later reprints of the book including, most recently (2012), the one by the Barfield Press, which represents the Barfield Estate and is very much involved, if it is not actually directly associated with the Anthroposophical Society of Great Britain.

What does this omission say about the position of anthroposophical culture, and more specifically the Anthroposophical Society, in which Barfield finally found *himself* immersed and indeed submerged, relative to that broader "educated public" Barfield had yet very much in mind as his intended audience?

There is a section in "The Philosophy of S.T. Coleridge," that would also have needed some tactical editing. This is where the concept of 'polarity' is gone into in quite some depth. I dare say this exposition would also lie beyond the usual range of a non-anthroposophical reader's immediate experience and understanding. It is another instance in this book of that more recondite application of thought which Coleridge shares with a developed anthroposophical culture that, in this matter as well as in a good number of others, he rather singularly anticipates. Thus, I would edit out the section in this chapter that runs from "Now the second conception" to "I will not carry this any further nor attempt to say" etc. This section is in any case suddenly too involved and particularized as an exposition relative to the more general survey of historical thought Barfield has been and will be pursuing in the rest of his book. Most readers will be thrown by the sudden shift in level and attention over what are a good number of pages…[129]

[129] Needless to say, 'polarity' is a major, and possibly even the central, working concept in anthroposophical culture as such, only it is *in this essay too precipitously* gone into for the non-anthroposophical reader, and in any

## Further Deliberations

### (i)
### Side-stepping the Problem

And thus was the tragedy of our age, in which Barfield himself miscarries, at the time extended. Inseparable from Barfield's purposes at some point, as we have seen, was his crusade to bring an educated public around to the acceptance and study of Rudolf Steiner's teachings, which he regarded as an absolute necessity, and indeed primordial in our time. However, he had failed to smooth out some very real problems of comprehension in this book, had reneged, as it were, on his own procedure and intention. How, then, did Barfield do subsequently? To what extent, that is, can the Barfield who soon after became more broadly known for himself in the world, as his own thinker, be said to have succeeded in the additional task he had once set himself of bringing all of his readers along into the necessary thought-world and experience of Steiner's teachings?

It is my own view that Barfield was never more involved or more efficient in this crusade and task, or more universally inspired—inspired, that is to say, for all human beings, non-anthroposophical and anthroposophical *at one and the same time*—than when he first broke out onto the scene, from inside his own experience, with his 6 first essays on the historical evolutionary process of the three Souls as discussed above, and that subsequently his own history is one of a gradual immersion in the Society-experience such as trammelled him, to the point where the broader task was lost sight of, or at least could no longer be engaged in, as an actual efficient cause of his work. In the meantime, he had emerged as his own thinker more or less well-followed since, but by then far from the success he had once counted on in seeking to reach out to the greater world he wished to win over more specifically to Rudolf Steiner, his method, and his teachings.

Barfield may, in his later work, from time to time bring Steiner into his discussion, but this is in a way that he has by then made his own as his own teacher, now out as himself in the

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case gone into in too great elaboration suddenly, relative to the standard level of exposition in the rest of this volume. More fittingly, it is the concept that underlies the whole of Barfield's later collection, *The Rediscovery of Meaning*, where he presents it as indeed "the distinguishing mark, if one single distinguishing mark should be insisted on, of the "anthroposophy" associated with the name of Rudolf Steiner." Even so, Barfield is primarily addressing the non-anthroposophical reader in this later book, and the concept is nowhere developed specifically from Steiner's expositions but is rather by then his own adopted concept, made very much his own albeit from years of working with the Steiner teachings.

wide world. His later work has been stripped of those abstruser excursions into Steiner's teachings that he had ventured into before that would only have been comprehensible to anthroposophists, but it also offers no more efficient elucidation of those teachings than heretofore, relative to the broader task he had once set himself. The problem of reaching out and bringing along was now being side-stepped in what may seem like an opposite way but is really only another expression of the same position of separateness or alienation from the rest of struggling, open-minded humanity, however limited their own numbers might be.

How many would take up or do take up with Steiner today after an encounter with Barfield and on learning as ever about his utmost deference to Steiner? Who, as a result of encountering Barfield, will have taken up Steiner's teachings and begun to make a "vocation" of it, as Barfield once insisted was a necessary condition for understanding ourselves in our time? He spoke of a "vocation,"[130] and not merely an 'interest,' even a serious one, or for that matter the mistaken 'idea' of supposing one is fashioning a new 'identity' for oneself merely on the basis of a cursory or a desultory exposure to those teachings.[131] Most will have simply stuck to Barfield. In any event, the focus has shifted in his later work from Barfield *and* Steiner to Barfield with passing if pointed allusions to a "world" opened up by Steiner that Barfield now feels it would be "inappropriate," in the context in which he is now speaking, to be expounding further:

> *It would be inappropriate … to attempt to expound the sporadic allusions in the ensuing pages into anything like an exposition of anthroposophy.*
>
> (*The Rediscovery of Meaning*, 1977)

Over and beyond this statement Barfield goes on to say:

> *There are a good many* [people] *now,* ***and I am one of them,*** [who] *have Steiner's anthroposophy in common somewhat as we all have the natural world in common…*

—another (complete) world thus known, by default, only to these people of whom he is one. And so did the division of the ways continue, tragically. Or so the situation seems to me to have been, and has continued to be. An untranscended situation of separateness or alienation (the consequence of a form of dereliction, a failure of will, group assimilation/exclusiveness, arrogance?) goes back a long way…[132]

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[130] In the Introduction to the 1966 edition of *Romanticism Comes of Age*.

[131] The "vocation" of which Barfield speaks is in respect of a method of work, as indicated above, which could be in various spheres. See also below p.10ff.

[132] Cf. what Barfield says in his Introduction to the 1944 edition: "I had not the abilities which such a task required." Over and against this claim, his later work shows that, in fact, he had the most prodigious abilities

(ii)

## A Method Crying Out for Development

I have been outlining that aspect of Barfield's work that may be finally described as 'pathetic' in the strict sense of falling short of the wondrous achievement he had once set for himself as his desired goal. The consequences of his failure to bring a general readership over to a determined and careful study of Steiner's teachings were generally tragic, but among other things a golden opportunity was lost to introduce into the contemporary experience a new method of historical literary criticism that would have radically altered the course of intellectual history in our time. In the first 6 chapters of *Romanticism Comes of Age*, which are the earliest writings of his to appear in this book, Barfield was well on his way with such a method which he derived specifically from Steiner's teachings. It concerns, to repeat, an application to "the interplay between the three soul-principles"—Sentient-Soul, Intellectual-Soul, and Consciousness-Soul—understood as "a moving historical spectacle." This description is taken from Barfield's essay on the *Divine Comedy*, in which, unfortunately, he only sporadically continues with this method, as in the conclusion he draws that "the 'Paradiso' reveals itself as the dramatized picture of an historical epoch in the evolution of human consciousness"; "*The Divine Comedy*", he explains further, "is the paramount expression in literature of the Sentient soul, just as *Hamlet* is of the Consciousness soul and *Faust* of the Intellectual soul." To this commentary Barfield also adds the further qualification: "But, unlike the other two, it was written *in the age of the Intellectual Soul*."[133]

Such distinctions may (very) briefly characterize the range of the method involved, which is pursued in very significant depth in the earlier 6 essays. This method necessarily involves at every step both an elucidation of, and a further application to, the relevant teachings in Steiner, a method which could only issue forth in a progressively more and more intense and a wider and wider engagement with those teachings as a basis for work in this form of criticism. If only Barfield had at this time applied this method to *The Divine Comedy* (or for that matter *Faust*) with the same concentrated approach as he had done in his essay, "The Form of *Hamlet*,"

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of explication, but by then had been much diverted by his own growing role as a language critic and a social-philosophical critic in the world.

[133] It is a measure of the deep subtlety of the historical realities concerned that Goethe's *Faust* should be understood to be "the paramount expression" of the *Intellectual* Soul in the Consciousness-Soul age, and Dante's *Commedia* of the *Sentient* Soul in the Intellectual Soul age. Similarly, one can speak of Steiner's Mystery Plays if not as "the paramount expression" at least a first perfection (now moving towards the future) of the *Imaginative* Soul in the Consciousness Soul age, and, indeed, still greater Soul powers than this…

a show of the limitless relevance of this method would have come across to the reader with still greater force. It could be applied to every shade of nuance and distinction in studying the full range of authors in any given period, going far back into history just as it would stretch deep into the defining conditions of our own times (see n.1). As it was, Barfield scattered himself in his essay on Dante, wandering into a broad survey covering many details in the epic that were incidental to the purpose that had been driving him up to that point. There is a gap of some three years between it and the essay on *Hamlet*, which was the last in that original series of 6 that had held him so tightly over a four-year period before that. Several diverting influences had interposed themselves in the interval.

The only other essay from the rest of the whole of Barfield's work that continues closely in the historical literary method I have brought into focus here would not appear for another 30 years! This is the essay "Where is Fancy Bred?" published in 1968, only two years after the publication of the newly expanded edition of *Romanticism Comes of Age* in 1966. One may speculate that, in preparing the publication of this book, Barfield may well have been brought back, momentarily, to the method he had been developing in its earlier portions. The essay takes us still farther along in Barfield's historical account, now into the Romantic period.[134] Another Soul-faculty appears in this farther period, a *new* emergence arising out of an additional ferment in the historical development of the Consciousness Soul. This new faculty Barfield had already brought forward, as far back as the original 6 essays, as the "Imaginative Soul," adopting Steiner's own term.[135] The emergence of this new faculty is described as following on "the entry of the ego into the death experience of the Consciousness-Soul—in order to be reborn as individual spirit, as individual-universal spirit" etc. Wordsworth and Coleridge especially are brought into focus here. And as with so much else that develops *with* the Romanticism of this period, Shakespeare is seen to have been a prophet of this new faculty, indeed of this and so much more: "Shakespeare knew all about the birth of the Romantic Movement two hundred years or so before it happened!"[136] And it is altogether along the lines of the direction of *these* insights, *and in a close application of the method* that underlies them, that some thirty years later, I found myself, as a literary critic *and* anthroposophist, pursuing my own account of Shakespeare's momentous evolution in consciousness in passing on from his "great" tragedies to the late "romances"—this in *Othello's Sacrifice*, 1996, and in *Prospero's Powers*, 2002, which

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[134] See *The Rediscovery of Meaning*. The essay is based on a lecture Barfield gave under the auspices of the Anthroposophical Society under the title "The Consciousness Soul and the Romantic Movement."

[135] See "Speech, Reason, and imagination" in *Romanticism Comes of Age*.

[136] "[E]very student of the genesis of the Romantic Movement in Europe quickly discovers how intimately it was involved with a new and deeper appreciation of the universal significance of the genius of Shakespeare."

were reprinted together in *Remembering Shakespeare*, 2016.[137] All this after a sudden life-changing encounter with Barfield and his work in this method that spoke to me all the more as it was being pursued in the firm confidence that in addressing his audience he was bringing *every* reader of his essays along, anthroposophical as well as non- anthroposophical, which is to say, every member of that broader "educated public" he had very much in mind.

I saw my work, pursued in this same vein, as the renewed expression of a School of criticism to which I felt I belonged along with Barfield in his very earliest impulse, as expressed in the original 6 essays I have highlighted here. I was aware of his bitter complaint that people had not listened to him when it came to bringing Steiner into the equation, but I still believed that my venture in my later, and seemingly more open-minded time would be worth the attempt, and in any case it was inevitable that I should take this direction in my account, being, as it was, the nature of the case that Shakespeare could not be properly understood otherwise. Barfield was still blaming all those who would not listen when he brought out the first edition of *Romanticism Comes of Age* in 1944 (in his Introduction to that edition), but this he does even while he had before him in those first 6 chapters, under his nose as it were, the very method that would have made more possible, but which he had left behind over 10 years previously. In respect of the cause he once espoused, with such hope and expectation at the time, Barfield failed himself. He did not abide by his cause, as he would have needed to at all costs, to satisfy that expectation. This is hardly to detract from the metaphysical grandeur of his later role as a philosopher of language, science, nature, man, spirit, and society, as he ventured more broadly out into the public world of letters. *The Rediscovery of Meaning*, published in 1977, is a testament to that grandeur. But he was doing so by then in his own right, as his own teacher without working with his audience on Steiner at all very closely. He had abandoned the notion. A measure of where he stood by then is the late essay "Language and Discovery" published, as had many of his former pieces, in the Anthroposophical Society journal, *The Golden Blade*, and which is included in *The Rediscovery of Meaning*. Quite the opposite of what he intended at one time, no longer is he thinking of bringing Steiner and Anthroposophy to the world but is there rather bringing his breakdown of the situation in the world back to the Anthroposophical Society.

What, in the context of this major about-face, could my own efforts to carry on with Barfield's method at a much later time have availed, waged, as it turned out, in a solitary battle, when on both sides of the cultural divide it was felt that there was no rapprochement to be had, and when one of our best-endowed proponents of this method had himself reneged long before?

[137] This series in my application of the method would culminate in my monograph on Steiner's Mystery Plays: *The New School of the Imagination*, 2007.

(iii)

## Regression

Along with "Language and Discovery," "Where is Fancy Bred" (which appears in the same book, though written some 10 years earlier) is another telling reflection of the position Barfield had reached by this late point in his career. It too was addressed (originally as a lecture) to an anthroposophical audience, and in this case he makes a special point (in his Introduction to this book) of the fact that it was addressed to "no others." Inversely, with this essay Barfield saw himself as bringing to the *non*-anthroposophical reader, out in the broader world, an item that he sees as especially representative of an anthroposophical setting of shared thought and experience. In spite of its more exclusive origins in respect of this setting, which he assumes has consequently made for a more challenging essay than the rest, he has decided, he says, to include the essay in this book: "I have included it nonetheless."

The tone in context is brazen. I have already quoted from the passage in question. Barfield has noted that it would be "inappropriate" to offer to expound Steiner's anthroposophy in the context of the drift of his book, but in the same breath has felt the need to dwell on the extent to which a limited group, of which he is one, hold anthroposophy to heart to the point of sharing that world as all of us have the natural world in common. *They* have that other world in as real a way, while the rest of us *others* are stone blind to it. "Where is Fancy Bred" was addressed to that anthroposophical audience, of which Barfield makes the point that it "contained no others," but he has insisted on including the essay in his book "nonetheless." Those "others" will have the essay whether they can make sense of it, or are offended by it, or not; "nonetheless" a ray of hope is offered: "there *may be* some among *those others* to whom it need not be unintelligible and may be suggestive [my italics]."

Barfield is here asserting himself, with some arrogance, but in the face of what? the blind ignorance of "those others"? or is it out of a need of his own to compensate for his alienation from them, stemming from an exclusiveness that over the years has been created precisely out of the difference between himself and his group and "those others?" The irony in all this is that "Where is Fancy Bred" is the one essay in *Rediscovery* in which Barfield is offering an exposition that is precisely in the old vein he had once idealized as his goal, addressing both the anthroposophical and non-anthroposophical reader at one and the same time. It will be comprehensible to both, but he does not know it, in his by now deep-set, self-deceived disillusionment has lost sight of the ideal effectiveness of his former method. In this essay, unlike in the rest of the volume, he quotes and works with—that is to say, *elucidates and applies*—

Steiner's ideas closely in the old way, and there can be no question of "those others" failing to follow this exposition…

In one of his earliest essays from the original series of 6, "Thinking and Thought," first published in 1927, we find the following passage:

> *A kind of bigotry and arrogance is sometimes imputed to anthroposophists for their exclusive emphasis upon* [Steiner's] *work, and their movement, in so many different departments of life. The answer is in the facts themselves. Those who have accepted Steiner's priceless gift are not the choice and picked ones of the earth: they are simply those who have felt out of the depths of their being the fearful need of this living, creative thinking. They are only too glad to take and use such thinking wherever they may find it. But where do they find it? Does the traveller, dying of thirst, stop to complain because the torrent gushes from a single spring instead of oozing up out of every stone beneath his feet?*

In this passage—written at the latest 1944, though possibly even in the days in which it was first written, namely 1927! (not having access to the textual record, I am not in the position to say), we have the same brazenness and the same arrogance, belying the passage's manifest content, which is intended to defend his group from just such attitudes. *They* are in the light ("a single spring") while the rest of *others* grope about in a pathetic darkness (have, for water, only what is barely "oozing up out of every stone" (very unpromising) having no sense themselves of "dying from thirst" (for everyone is happy here). Such an *extreme* barrier put up between one group and the other, *this already back then*, and to be found in an essay that is itself one of the original 6 in which Barfield has been working out a method that is seeking to engage every educated reader at the same time! Barfield's words themselves assume that very exclusiveness and arrogance from which he is aiming to defend himself (if not a full "bigotry" surely). Such a need to justify himself at the expense of the effort of inclusion that could be made and that *was otherwise being made* in this very series of 6 essays in which these words were placed! One need not argue any further the deep hold such attitudes have had in the Anthroposophical Society, indeed from very early on, when even one of its most promising sons could not help shackling himself to them, contradicting himself in his own purposes even when he sought to transcend them, all the while complaining that he was not being listened to about Steiner! The insidious extent of such self-defeating tendencies in the history of the Anthroposophical Society cannot in the last analysis be left out of any account that would truthfully explain why Steiner has not taken greater hold of more of our humanity up to this very day, or why it is complacently felt (on both sides of the great divide) that there is no rapprochement to be had, and so no rapprochement to work at. And it is with a deep undermining sadness, and indeed bitterness of my own, that I awake today

to recognize this astonishing contradiction in Barfield's career after this review of what could have borne fruit as a radical if not a revolutionary incursion into literary-historical method in our time.

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# PART IV

# *On Rational Man's Catastrophic Denial of Romance in Dostoevski's "A Gentle Creature"*

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(A first instance in my intended series of late-life 'Afterthoughts', the present paper was intended to add to my broader studies in Tragic Romance, which go back as far as my *Othello's Sacrifice* (later incorporated into *Remembering Shakespeare*). Other studies in this sphere include my later books on Novalis and Rilke, as well as my projected book on 'Shakespeare, Novalis, and their Succession' that finally took the form of the paper given in Part I of this collection. Closer to the more localized analytic spirit of the present paper are a number of my essays in my *Tragical Historical* (cited above, p.27), notably the essay on "Rousseau and the Legacy of Passion-Love: Old and New Heloise," and, more recently, my paper on "Tolstoy's Wilful Prejudicing of Anna's Fate in 'Anna Karenina'" given below).

*And will he not come again?*
*And will he not come again?*
*No, no he is dead.*
*Go to thy deathbed.*
*He never will come again.*
—Ophelia, from *Hamlet*

*The poor soul sat sighing by a sycamore tree*
*Her hand on her bosom, her head on her knee.*
—Desdemona, from *Othello*

Paradoxically, the singing of the woman towards the end of 'A Gentle Creature' is an indication that Dostoevski saw his story as operating in a long and honoured tradition of tragic romance that dates back at least as far as Shakespeare—*paradoxically*, or not so simply, considering the extreme austerity of the action for which the man in this story is largely responsible, and of the woman's end which we resist in a way not quite endemic to tragedy, let alone romantic tragedy. The form of the woman's own singing is itself an indication of a difference that brings in a new factor:

*… the song was so faint—I don't mean mournful (it was a romance of some sort), but it was as if there was something cracked, or broken, as if the little voice could not cope, as if the song itself were ill.*[138]

Something less purely problematic—or impure—has entered into this scene than what we traditionally find in tragic romance, something that has to do with the effects of the rationalized scheme the man introduces into the story by which he would presume to a complete control of his fate and that of the woman now that they are living together as man and wife. All stems in turn from an earlier incident in the man's life that Dostoevski has conceived to perfection for purposes of tragic plausibility.

## Unravelling the Story

In this earlier incident—of such dramatic consequence in his life—the man found himself put in a situation that could only compromise him one way or the other. He would not take up a role concocted by his regiment out of a purely abstract principle of "honour" over a situation that never happened. To have assumed that role would have meant to follow through absurdly on the basis of an established un-truth. The situation challenges him in his "pride" of himself, which in the circumstances is far from unfitting, and, one feels, indeed inevitable. How much of this "pride" is to be set down to a "haughtiness" that might be its own abstract principle would seem to be finally irrelevant to the outcome of the situation, or its resolution, though it is of some bearing in his future action with his wife. In the earlier incident, there is the suggestion that a duel ought to have been involved, so that the man is menaced by an impression of his cowardice in this matter that will also follow him deep into his life with his wife, being the complication that serves, in fact, as the efficient cause of their undoing (if still not the main cause.)

Resigning from the army in contempt, and falling into a three-year period of extreme destitution that is due in part to that additional "haughtiness" of his that did not permit him to take on any work unworthy of himself, in part to his brother-in-law's squandering of their family monies, by another chance, or fateful event, he is restored to fortune with another inheritance, and at that point conceives his "plan" of a complete self-restitution by assuming the controlling function of a pawnbroker. He will now make his own fortune and in time retire altogether, far away from the society he has known that has degraded him in such a complete way. There are ambiguities in his new situation that are not fully accounted for. Thus, his principal nemesis had been the army, and in the larger picture, with reference to his "plan," it is true that he is "getting his own back" specifically against that society, but in the meantime, as

[138] All quotations from the 2009 Oxford World's Classics edition of the story as translated by Alan Myers.

a pawnbroker, is having to take advantage, to build his fortune, of the down-and-out poor among whom he once belonged for a time. "Society" has turned into a generalized enemy encompassing the whole social scene of his world, and this idea of society is what would appear to justify his apparent ruthlessness with the poor, the strictness he is committed to, in his necessary negotiations with them. He has made a point of never exploiting them, offering them at every turn, as he explains, always what their goods are properly worth, but the compromising ambiguity remains, and is later opposed by his wife, becoming the basis on which the tragic downturn in this story's action (the *peripeteia*, in classic tragic terminology) takes place.

The offense to his "pride" that the army charade had constituted the pawnbroker otherwise describes as an injury to his "high-mindedness"; he sees himself as having been at the time, in fact, "the most high-minded of men," ruled by "my passionate impulse towards you," which was tyrannically and gratuitously met with their "injury." Nothing else is given as a description of this impressive quality he has attributed to himself, apart from the character he evinces through the far-ranging tone of his speech in the soliloquy he is addressing to us. The question remains would one say he *is*, or would have been, as high-minded as he claims? It says a good deal that he has chosen to live a life with she whose own high-mindedness is not to be doubted. Her transcendence of her horrifyingly sordid life as a menial to her aunts, by seeking successfully to formally educate herself notwithstanding the depth of her subjection: "*there* was high-mindedness," (66) he boasts of her, "a good indication of aspirations toward the lofty and the noble" (67). He otherwise lauds her for "her (philosophical) sincerity" (66), and is taken aback by her possession of a "worldly wisdom" and "brilliance" (80) beyond her years when in the company of one of the pawnbroker's denigrators from whom she extracts details of the pawnbroker's former life. In this respect she is pointedly contrasted with her informer whom the pawnbroker delineates as "a worldly, dull-minded creature with the soul of a reptile," invoking with this denigration of his own his sense of that extreme opposition of worlds (high-minded and low-minded) from which he originally suffers. "Wasn't that why I loved and prized her?" he adds fulsomely (81). In this episode he goes so far as to speak of "a woman of the most exalted nobility" (80). It is all of it a vague characterization, divorced from any narration or direct statement of her own, but nevertheless it is the crucial given of Dostoevski's story clearly intended to round out this scene.

Clearly, the pawnbroker has not, in spite of his deep resentment of the fate he once incurred, reneged on "high-mindedness" and the force of life that lies behind it. Suddenly his "plan" of life has evolved with additional "notions" of harnessing this force, which through her has come back into his life, and making it now into a functional operative in his aim of a final restitution, looking ahead to his—now their—full retirement from "society." "High-

mindedness" only requires to be channelled towards what has become a now properly "real" purpose that would put them beyond "society"'s degrading charade. In the meantime, such high-mindedness must not be allowed to undermine these purposes by taking its own direction, which could only be counter-productive and a continuation in a vulnerably unreal idea of life: we have been enjoined to consider the dire straits into which the pawnbroker's original, well-intentioned "passionate impulse towards" society had gotten him.

Idealistic "high-mindedness" is to be reined in, in order to serve now a new realism or practical "broadmindedness" (this perfectly symmetrical opposition of terms being itself a gloating expression of his new philosophy.) His aim, as we have seen, is to circumnavigate society's degrading influences, and at last to set them together apart in a remote lifestyle far from those influences. However, he has not explained his larger vision of his purposes to his wife when he proceeds to claim "broadmindedness" as the only genuine form a truly high-minded spirit can take, being in the end the only genuine "heroism." Her less than comfortable objection to this discourse, even if initially muted, is an indication that she already grasps a serious problem in the idea, and soon enough she has expressed herself more openly in some contempt of the pecuniary "miserliness" that is necessary for these purposes, but only because it offends her spirit that he must make a point of declaring himself in it, cutting himself off from her also in his feelings as if these too might threaten a spirit of "economy." Her genuinely loving "embraces" and "outbursts" of affection, which are at first repeated freely ("I was certain she loved me at that time"), having much to do with gratitude for his having freed her from her hopelessly sinister circumstances and his seeming to offer her a genuine life of freedom—all this he receives "coldly": "I was quick to pour cold water over all this rapture."

The tragic downturn in this story, which from hereon in will throw everything awry, occurs with this young woman's possibly merely instinctive defiance of this "system" of life set down for them by the pawnbroker, when on more than one occasion she overbuys from the poor who are their clients. When he insists that it is after all *his* money she is doling out, the dykes break loose and what has been simmering in her by way of revolt against the excessive strictness of his regime breaks loose. It is the 'other' side of her character which now surfaces and begins to reign, which yet only puts her in a great conflict with herself: not the "gentle and kindly" self, "noble," "wise," "brilliant," "pure," and "sinless" that she has otherwise come across as being (all epithets granted to her by himself), but a now generally "wild" self, breaking out from her former "sneering" and "derisiveness" at his miserliness into something positively "obstreperous" and "belligerent," and "deliberately courting trouble", this from the time she learns further about his problematic past which he has kept from her. She is driven to seek out this information on him when in this catalytic episode he goes so far as to deny her any further

role in his business, thus introducing a serious separation between them. He has overplayed his hand, from overidentification with his purposes which seem threatened by her generosity and defiance, and principally from the "pride" he has taken in himself in devising these purposes in the first place as a prospective resolution of his tragic past (here is the classic tragic *hubris* at work in a modern context). From here, the conflict only worsens and escalates, reaching a climax in the revolver episode that finally implicates her in an impulse to crime against him that will demean her and for this reason break her spirit down irreversibly.

He had unconsciously taken a revolver with him when seeking her out on one of her reconnaissance meetings with her informer, and this she has taken as his grave intent against her. On their return home, she duplicates this intent against him, wielding the revolver at his face while he appears to be sleeping. He had in the meantime deliberately left the revolver out and, simulating sleep, is fully aware of her intent throughout the episode, but he braves her action in order to dispel the impression she has received about him of his former cowardice. Her mere charade of intent in this episode is yet enough to make her feel implicated in an intention of crime, and she has in the meantime lost out in the struggle to find a proper basis for her protest against his draconian ways. She has been defeated and "conquered" by him, as he puts it, and by now the spirit of freedom she had thought of inheriting in her life with him has worn away irrecoverably, irreversibly compromised by the whole scene of their opposition to each other and tragic conflict.

She has, in the meantime, seen him prove himself. She falls gravely ill from the conflict and for a long time, and it is only at an advanced point in her convalescence that the pawnbroker very suddenly has his moment of self-reckoning and self-recognition (his *anagnorisis*), overwhelmed by the intense love of her which in the meantime has been growing in him all along in spite of his "cold" regime. However, she is unable to bear or to accommodate the intensity of this overwhelming emotional reversal in him; it is too much and has come too late, in spite of his sincerity in it, which is yet only relative considering his own confessed "desperation" in it, as the situation, he knows, has already gone very far. He is making preparations for them to enter into a whole new life between them when, without his suspecting anything from her of the sort, and while he is out, in her despair that anything genuine or free will now be actually possible between them, she throws herself out of their apartment window, plummeting to her death. And now she is lying in state, once again in their bed (she had been banished from it, after the revolver episode), and it is as they await her removal in a coffin that the pawnbroker launches into his narration of the course of events that have brought them to this, so searingly emotional, defeated end (or *catastrophe*).

The whole is thus given to us strictly through the pawnbroker's narration, which, in spite of his intensely self-conscious confusion as to how he could justify himself in this story, does not appear to have falsified the evidence, not being sparing in any of its detail…

## Unravelling Character and Fate

The question imposes itself why the pawnbroker did not explain his purposes and account for his past to his wife from the first. At the height of the conflict between them, she makes a case of this to the point of wondering why he did not do so before they married. This strikes us as, in fact, an ancillary issue of not much consequence to their life, as it is most unlikely that she would have refused him on the basis of his account: her circumstances at the time were so degrading, and her prospect of an alternative life with a much older man who would seem to be incapable of any notion of love for her, as imposed on her by her guardian aunts, could hardly have swayed her otherwise. An account of himself at that time could, in any case, have been communicated only abstractly, without much actual sense of what it all imported. In his narration, the pawnbroker takes up this issue from the first: "how could he have explained all this to her," in any meaningful way? She would have to "discover for herself" what the situation was with him on the basis of his noble resolution of the suffering he had been through as reflected in the wisely settled character he had in the meantime acquired from it: "to divine for herself the truth about this man and comprehend him." Much of his essential "pride" is implicated in this matter: it is in his "pride" in the truth of the real situation, in spite of appearances to the contrary, that his real character lies. In this sense, he could not formally, and self-apologetically, explain his situation to her, anymore than he could have complied at one time with his regiment's artificial bidding. It is just in the nature of this fated story, as Dostoevski has skilfully devised it, that he could do neither one nor the other.

That his wife will discover for herself what he is truly about in his ideal sense is precisely what does not happen, for they are soon caught up in a battle with each other. Her own excessive attitude and way of responding to their situation is likewise out of a principle of "pride" in her that has its own, somewhat more obscure background—"she's a proud one," one of her aunts confides to the pawnbroker at the time of his wooing. Significantly, we find her reaching a veritable pitch of pride in her battle with him precisely when he begins to explain his experience in the regiment: "'to take action against tyranny of that sort and accept all the consequences meant demonstrating a great deal more courage than fighting a duel.'" She responds to this explanation by "burst(ing) into malicious laughter," made only the more "avid for humiliating explanations" from him. This reaction highlights the whole problem of self-justification that the pawnbroker has raised as an issue that had led him to forego a formal

explanation from the first. Here is the basis also for his saying, in a great consternation, "she was a tyrant, the intolerable tyrant and tormentor of my soul," a role she has assumed that is all the more shocking in someone who is otherwise admired and celebrated by him, and comes across as indeed, "this delight, this gentle creature, this heaven," rapturously disposed at first to express herself with him in a fully sincere "love" that is openly grateful for the freed-up life he appears to have opened up to her.

Admittedly her reaction to his explanations of himself when they do come later, in their halting way, occurs after he has overplayed his hand. I have brought out the excessive pride, or brute power, he has displayed in going so far as to banish her from her role in their business. Behind this action we discern an over-insistence on his rational scheme of breaking his young wife into the lifestyle he conceives as the only one that will bring the results he seeks to fulfil his purposes for them. One must emphasize especially this finally unreal, rationalistic *excess* in the pawnbroker's position, which goes far beyond the actual emotional necessities of their situation or any real consideration of their general well-being. His insistent abstract rationalism, which takes the form of a psychologically extreme realism, becomes, in the final analysis, the principal enemy to their hopeful life, and goes a long way to explaining the final cause of this tragedy.

At the same time, her resistance to what he stands for as a confirmed position in life is there, "flaring up" at him, from the first, when she visits his shop initially. What, then, is the ultimate basis of her revolt? It is a "pride" that is its own reality, based in its own world, *and precisely of the kind that was formerly his*. It is that very "high-mindedness" that the pawnbroker had at some point resolutely banished from his life in order to successfully see his plan for psychological survival through. This woman represents, indeed, the strange *return* into his life of a "high-mindedness" that will not bear or accept the kind and degree of subjection he has planned out and is now enjoining of them, thus further challenging and problematizing his "plan." As he cryptically notes along the way: "there was an irony here, do you see, a bitter irony of fate and nature!" One could say that unconsciously he had remained troubled by his own "high-mindedness" in spite of his resolutions, had not quite "conquered" it, for he had *himself* sought out this "gentle creature," and had indeed alighted on her as his wife. He had thought, thereby, to prove himself more thoroughly in the new vision of the "power" he had conferred on himself to break such high-mindedness in, to "conquer" at last—but "fate and nature" intervened dramatically, to foil and utterly confound his "notions."

When, a good number of months into his wife's convalescence—and, as it happens, after hearing her take up with her singing, the pawnbroker comes at last into his overwhelming moment of enlightenment, breaking through his pretensions and the inhuman excess of his ways

(his *anagnorisis*), and the dykes of his love of his wife are at last opened, which, in spite of himself has been growing in him intensely over this whole time, and he recants, passionately abasing himself before her, seeing at last that he has been "agonizingly wrong" with her—his confession comes too late, and is far too much of an emotional reversal for his hopelessly weakened and defeated wife to bear, let alone absorb, introducing, in fact, but a whole new trauma into her life…

Tragically, their romance has, by then, already passed beyond them, and from here the action proceeds ineluctably to its utterly hopeless end (the *catastrophe*). It is a tragedy in the end too poignantly and intolerably hopeless, denying as it has the whole prospect of a personal evolution in romance between them. We might describe it as the tragedy of the broad-minded 'real' utterly overwhelming and forever banishing the high-minded 'ideal,' this being the new tragedy to which Dostoevski would alert us, the tragedy of rational man. Here was Dostoevski indeed re-visiting the tradition of tragic romance, but with a whole new difference. We bear witness to *this* tragedy's overwhelming and utterly unique haunting power, all conceivable human hopes being finally denied in it. Any "paradise" the pawnbroker would actually have intended for them, had he *at*tended to his growing feelings for this woman and given them full sway, is utterly foregone, has passed beyond them forever…

And how halting must the pawnbroker's speech be, and how hopelessly involuted his narration, which would begin to come to terms with *this* tragedy, so blindly, and sadistically, brought on by him:

> *I had conquered … she had been vanquished, but not forgiven … I had avenged all my grim past history … she had learned … This thought enraptured me … I deliberately postponed the denouement; what had occurred was, for the moment, more than enough for my peace of mind … and as regards her, in my view* ***she could wait*** *…*

It was his readiness to *leave* her in her defeated condition—and for "a whole winter," "'to leave me *like that*,'" as she put it—*this* that finally destroyed her faith and broke her will to come around to them again…

At the end of this story, the pawnbroker describes with a searingly full and accurate precision the irreversibly hopeless world rationalizing man at last inherits as a result of this final tragedy:

> *Inertia … Oh, nature! People on earth are alone, that is the calamity of it! 'Is anyone alive on the plain?' shouts the old Russian hero, and no one responds. I am no epic hero, but I too shout, and no one responds. They say the sun animates the universe. The sun will rise, and look at it—is it not a corpse? Everything is dead and corpses are everywhere. Only people exist and around them*

*is silence—that is what the earth is! 'People, love one another!' Who said that? Whose behest is that? The pendulum ticks on, insensible, horrible. It's two o'clock in the morning. Her shoes are standing by her little bed, as if they expected her … no, seriously, when they take her away tomorrow, what on earth am I going to do?*

This is the world as it will at last appear to rationalizing man out of the depths of a final presumption, utterly divorced as he will be by then from the inalienable sanctities of human desire without which no full and proper evolution in human spirit can take place.

Dostoevski would frighteningly alert us to this terrible prospect before it is too late.

And might it not be too late?

(*hamartia*, *hubris*, *peripeteia*, *anagnorisis*, *catastrophe*)

## The Woman's End

The further question will, of course, be asked what finally becomes of the woman in Dostoevski's story? She plunges to her death embracing to herself the very icon depicting Mother and Child that she had brought to pawn early on. "I could see she treasured it," the pawnbroker had remarked back then, and yet, on account of her difficult straits, she is more than ready to let it go when the pawnbroker would himself refrain from taking it offering to detach it from its frame. The woman seems put off by the idea of having to take it back: "All right, detach it," she replies wearily. There is, otherwise, no other reference to the icon in the whole of this story until the moment before the woman's plunge to death when she is described by her maid as seeming to pray to it (at which point, we have to be reminded! that this is the same icon that has been mentioned earlier). There has been but that bare mention of her having "treasured it." This reference could be saying almost anything, and in fact deliberately obscures any meaning that could be attached to it. It may be conveying the simple sense of the icon's personal significance for the woman with memories of a past life attached to it, a treasured heirloom, etc. Likewise, in the woman's final scene, there is but the bare mention of it "looking as if" the woman had been praying to the icon, and otherwise only that at the last moment she is seen "clutching the icon to her breast"; no other suggestions of any sort are developed around this bare mention of the matter.

Clearly, Dostoevski was not concerned with developing the religious, and one can only deduce that it has little bearing on what we finally make of the fate of this unhappy couple other than as an appurtenance or accessory to their story. Its inclusion in the exposition suggests the presence of an alternative fate that distinguishes itself absolutely from theirs and has no influence on it whatsoever. It may *appear* as if Dostoevski intended more if one has in mind how this story

originated for him: that is, from an actual incident Dostoevski read about that involved a young girl who had plunged to her death holding such an icon. The incident had made quite an impression on him as an instance of what he describes as a "a sort of meek, humble suicide," something "strange and unheard of" in a suicide.[139] But none of this gets put into Dostoevski's story, for the good reason that he found himself in a very different world with the story he had finally created as the one he was offering to his readers.

There are illuminating parallels in Robert Bresson's filmic treatment of the religious theme in his astonishing adaptation of Dostoevski's story, which Bresson titled "A Gentle Woman" ("Une Femme Douce"). When, in this treatment, the woman brings the icon to the pawnbroker initially, and he immediately offers to return it to her (retaining, in the meantime, the gold frame on which it is set—in Bresson, the icon is a crucifix), the woman reacts with an attitude that frankly suggests she would not be thought associated with its religiousness and that parting from it is of no consequence to her. Towards the end, when, on the verge of her suicide, she is depicted suddenly absorbed in the icon's significance, it is with a feeble-minded, abstracted air that suggests very little understanding of what the icon actually signifies, an effect far removed from the genuine religious impression that is otherwise a trademark of Bresson's style and vision in his films generally. Structurally, Bresson presents her plunge into death as the equivalent in her experience of the pawnbroker's fanciful notion that, by abandoning their present circumstances and moving away to begin afresh, he is offering them any real notion of a future life for them. Bresson did not have far to go to come up with this idea. The structural pattern is in Dostoevski where the pawnbroker, on his side, conceives of a trip to Boulogne as "the final key to it all," fancifully imagining that "something quite different would commence," and "everything start anew"; desperately, he keeps repeating this notion to himself: "the main thing was Boulogne, Boulogne!" The fact is there are no further options for this couple, for the relationship is *meant* to be a searingly hopeless dead-end on both sides. The woman, for her part, represents not a religious item, rather a romantic possibility that has ceased to exist for the form of life this couple has dramatized between them. But she *has been*, in the end, that possibility, and she survives ringingly in our memory, especially by her death, as the hope we cannot afford to forswear without condemning ourselves to a final desolation. An impossible bitterness is all that remains to both man and woman here—a fact almost insufferably conveyed in Bresson by the grudge-bearing pose with which the woman, now dead, lies in state, returned at last to the couple's marital bed—she who is presented in Dostoevski's story as someone who was once "so pure and sinless, cherishing her ideal as she did" …

[139] See pp. xvi-xvii of our text.

*The battle for survival this man and this woman find themselves locked into is linked to a natural-scientific viewpoint far more fully established by the time Bresson is re-creating Dostoevski's story in mid-20th century Paris.*

*A film shot of the woman's reaction when she discovers that a separate bed has been set up for her. It is as if she recognizes that this event already marks the end for her.*


*There are film shots of the dead woman in Bresson's film in which he brings out still more emphatically the grudge-bearing aspect of the dead woman's physiognomy (as concentrated in her lower jaw).*

*Bresson's film is, indeed, a masterwork of adaptation of Dostoevksi's story, not least in the film's extraordinary ending. Now lying in a coffin, the woman is addressed by the pawnbroker with the mad entreaty that she "open your eyes, just once…" With the coffin then fully covered, we see him (the focus*

*pathetically reduced to his hand and arm), with a wrench of some strength and with several last twists of it, setting one of the coffin's many screws into place that will permanently seal the coffin lid …*

*Bresson's film is both viewable and downloadable at* https://rarefilmm.com/

# [140]*Tolstoy's Wilful Prejudicing of Anna's Fate in "Anna Karenina": A Case-Study in 'Olympian' Artistic License*

"The Apollonian teaches himself to despise woman,
and teaches woman to despise herself."[141]

John O'Meara

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Denis de Rougemont may have cited *Anna Karenina* as one instance of an authentic mediation of the historical stream of passion-love (or one, at least, involved in this aim[142]), but he would, no doubt, have gone on to invoke major qualifications to his somewhat desperate appreciation of this novel.[143] For in the world of this novel, Anna (neé Princess Oblonsky) stands hopelessly alone. It has been said that Hamlet's anguish (and even the heart of his mystery) consists in finding himself "in the wrong play for someone of his genius."[144] The same might well be said of Anna in the world of Tolstoy's novel. The cards are, indeed, stacked against her from the very beginning, and it is how Tolstoy wanted it. There is the most obvious matter of her greatly unequal partner in love, Vronsky, who hardly begins to echo her in magnanimous spirit. He is enamoured of her, certainly, is all attentive "chivalry," but the impulse behind his admittedly lasting "devotion" to her is no more than as iron filings, without forces of their own, will have attached themselves to a magnet. In time, it is said decisively (by the novel's narrator) that "at every meeting, she was bringing together her imaginary idea of him (an incomparably better one, impossible in reality) with him as he was" (357[145]). This might appear to show a failure of perception, or self-deception, on Anna's side, were it not that the filings *have* attached themselves to her, with an inevitability in the attachment that cannot be undone, as the novel establishes this ineluctably (in itself devious testimony to the artist, Tolstoy's magisterial sleight-of-hand). There is nothing that can be done about it: Vronsky cannot be better than who he is,

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[140] The present chapter was originally intended as an Afterword to a series of studies on passion love and moral reductionism that appeared in my book collection on Western cultural history from Boethius to Beckett, lately published as *Tragical Historical* (see the citation for this book above, on p.27).

[141] Robert Graves, from *The White Goddess*, Vintage, 1948, 502.

[142] See *Love in the Western World*, Princeton, 1983, orig.pub. 1940, 232.

[143] "Desperate" in that he is looking hard for instances of a positive reflection of the passion-love stream in modern literature.

[144] Bloom, *The Anatomy of Influence*, Yale University Press, 2011, 43.

[145] All quotations from the Penguin edition, translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, 2003.

and Anna 'knows' this for herself; only, in her magnanimity of spirit and in her desperate circumstances, she cannot think otherwise than to make things out to be as good as she wishes them to be. Tolstoy has, very simply, set it up this way.

Anna, from her side, fully embodies this power of the magnet. As in the case of her European precursors, Heloise, Julie de Lespinasse, and Rousseau's Julie, she expresses herself in a power of passion-love that stems from a complete, all-giving, magnanimous nature. It is in the constitution of her being to think of love only in one way, as she puts it to Vronsky: "'Love … means too much for me, far more than you can understand…'" (141). The effect she has on Vronsky stems, indeed, from another world: "it was as if a surplus of something so overflowed her being that it expressed itself beyond her will, now in the brightness of her glance and in her smile" (61: her all-expressive smile: "again a smile," "the same smile"—63 etc.) Much later in her story, as it happens very near the end—we shall return to this moment later—it is the same with her as in the beginning: she appears to Levin, the character who is clearly Tolstoy's appointed hero in this novel and his touchstone of "truthfulness," both "radiant with happiness, and giving happiness"; we hear from him, who is generally overwhelmed by Anna, that "besides intelligence, grace, beauty, there was truthfulness in her."(700) It is also said of Anna by Kitty, who will later be Levin's bride but who has mistakenly set her sights on Vronsky at an early point, that "there was in her [Anna] some other, higher world of interests, inaccessible to her [Kitty], complex and poetic" (71). In the meantime, Anna has bestowed her love on Vronsky: "'She loves me. She's confessed it'" (142), for "she knew he did have a heart" (139), and being "chivalrous" (73) he is at least capable, in spite of his otherwise ordinary nature, of recognizing and fitting himself to Anna's wondrous being in a spirit of chivalry, unlike her more than "unpoetical husband," as he is described by Kitty. This "chivalry" will indeed turn out to be faithfulness to Anna right through the bitter end. The "love" that emerges between them, dramatically unequal as it is, is a matter of "fate" (81), as Tolstoy would have it, "an accomplished fact" (82). As for how Anna could, in the meantime, ever have gotten herself into her "unpoetical" and very largely loveless marriage, there is not a single word of explanation from Tolstoy who is at great pains to hide away an anomaly that does not fit in any way the Anna who presents herself here.[146]

[146] In early versions of his novel, Anna's marriage (at eighteen) is accounted for as a case of "mistaking her wish to shine in society for love" (Pevear xix), but this was when Tolstoy conceived of her, in direct opposition to "the saintly husband," as the stale type of "the adulterous wife," not so different in kind from someone like Madame Bovary, though, even so, less interesting. As he worked on, Tolstoy "gradually enlarged the figure of Anna morally … the sinner grew in beauty and spontaneity," until at last she materialized, at her best, in that full splendor of her enlightened being that we come to know in the final version. Such a one could hardly be

Although the bond between Anna and Vronsky is presented as already "an accomplished fact," along with Anna's "exhilarating joy," constantly experienced by her, a somewhat superficial sense of "shame," stemming from her situation as a married woman, rises up in her automatically and from social conditioning, whereas on his side all is an expectant dutiful attentiveness while he claims his "right" (305) to her precisely by virtue of a "love" that is accomplished. That situation goes on for a full two months until, agreeing to continue without a commitment as yet, while letting things be "as they are," they begin to see each other often and quite openly, regardless of the effect this has on society, and this goes on for yet another ten months! In the meantime, we hear nothing said between them about where their relationship might be going, or how their circumstances would need to be addressed, considering that Anna is, after all, a married woman with a son whom she clearly adores. Can we really believe that this most extraordinary woman, recognized as such by everyone, "the best of all" (72) as Kitty puts it to her, or as even her son testifies: "no one is better than you" (537), and who is otherwise distinguished above all the others for her "intelligence" and "truthfulness" as well as "grace, beauty" etc.—that this woman would not have given any more thought than this to the complications she faces especially as a mother who loves her son thus? That Tolstoy *is* wilfully engaged in having the relationship between Anna and Vronsky in a certain hopeless way from the beginning is borne out by what is perhaps the most dramatic instance of the author's wilful prejudicing of Anna's fate: *without further ado*, Anna throws herself into a sexual liaison with Vronsky, only to suffer now the acutest pangs of "shame" and complete "despair" over having disgraced herself by this act?! [147] Very suddenly Anna is presented to us as the stereotypical "fallen woman" of the adulterous liaison, and her lover has now to contend with this wild and unbelievable transformation in her—as if this sudden new behavior of hers will not have put a huge damper from hereon in on how he is otherwise inclined to see her and has seen her until now, or, for that matter, the way we see her—being *otherwise* indeed the most accomplished woman that Tolstoy had yet conceived or would conceive again. Only after! this moment does Anna really begin to anguish over what this consummated liaison means for her relationship to her son, now that her situation has been dragged down to this so utterly compromised level. After this, she can only be necessarily out of all kilter for the whole of the rest of her unhappy life, notwithstanding her best, noble, but inevitably pathetic efforts (given

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thought to have joined with such a man as her husband, but that marriage remained necessary as a counterforce to love in Tolstoy's novel, being one such force among many.

[147] This is in Book II chapter xi. 148. This chapter follows on one that is very markedly irregular and indeed dramatically cut short, with long elliptical marks that break us off from the novel's narrative flow to this point. The shift from here to the scene of the lovers' tryst has the decided effect of a sudden arbitrary intervention that has all the signs of an unembarrassed, heavy-handed authorial intrusion into the novel's material.

her already downcast condition) repeatedly to stand up again in the face of the fundamental disconnection from herself that has taken place from the time of this enforced "fated" moment of Tolstoy's fabrication.[148]

So much for "passion-love according to Tolstoy." The serious claims passion-love would make on behalf of itself are not only not developed, they are swiftly stymied from the first. The extraordinary phenomenon of passion-love, and the great tradition associated with it, is never taken up, is eschewed. It was an easy way out of the challenge. When Anna announces to Vronsky that she has at last told her husband that she "could not be his wife" (314), but holds necessarily, as we would expect, to her son, she is described as hoping that some greater life will suddenly emerge for her that will sweep her away and summarily resolve her dilemma—when, of course, no such life could possibly emerge:

> *…she already knew that everything would remain the same as before, that she would be unable to scorn her position, to leave her son and unite herself with her lover … But all the same this meeting [with Vronsky] was extremely important for her. She hoped it would change their situation and save her. If at this moment he should say to her resolutely, passionately, without a moment's hesitation: 'Abandon everything and fly away with me!'—she would leave her son and go with him. But the news did not produce in him what she expected: he only seemed insulted by something.* (314-315)

This is to make of Anna another Madame Bovary lost to her dreamy nothings; she has earlier been linked also to a form of death-wish or flirtation with the experience of oblivion, "frightening" as this otherwise appears to her, anything to get her out of her humdrum life of lovelessness[149]. But Anna Oblonsky is not Madame Bovary; it is Tolstoy who wilfully insists on her being another such, as Anna Karenina.[150] So now that Anna has confessed, she is soon put out by her husband; inevitably, her son is denied to her, *and now* suddenly she is dying after giving birth to her child by Vronsky. Face-to-face with death, she desperately repents of her liaison, passionately embracing her husband and entreating him desperately to forgive her. At

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[148] What I describe as fabrication would appear to be the survival from earlier versions of the novel of that "other woman," the stereotype of the adulterous wife, as Anna was conceived of at one time. This "other woman" (412) is directly invoked by Anna herself in the repentance-scene farther along, but, in fact, she has nothing to do with the Anna who finally emerged, and in relation to this Anna can be spoken of as Tolstoy's fabrication here.

[149] "It was frightening to surrender herself to this oblivion." (101)

[150] Tolstoy was very familiar with Flaubert's novel. Not only was he in France at the time it was being serialized, he was then moving in a literary circle that was very much devoted to Flaubert's work. And yet Tolstoy himself hardly acknowledged the work at all, being it would appear secretly bent on outdoing the ironic effect of that famous work.

this moment, but only for this moment, her husband also turns out to be the most sensitive, forgiving man, lost likewise to his own desperate emotion about her! But only for that moment, because Anna recovers! and she now commits newly! to Vronsky who in the meantime has tried to shoot himself dead! Proof undeniable of his eternal devotion to her.

Impossible not to see in all this dramatic license, which defies any notion of verisimilitude, that Tolstoy is wilfully, even zestfully, having it all his own way—for sensational effect! All of these dramatic reversals in Anna's life, of which there are several, are his own pure fictions designed to make short shrift of the whole idea of passion-love, notwithstanding that he has in the meantime, in spite of himself, brought forth as representing that love the most beautiful and the noblest (the most sincerely heartful) woman of his making. He has made sure to bring this otherwise wondrous creation, who in a manner of speaking has escaped from him, or rather been wilfully released from him beyond the natural possibilities of his personality, suitably within the sphere of that naturalistic/deterministic psychological technique in which, as an artist, he was indeed perhaps supreme. There could be no place for the lofty uncertainties of passion love, or such a free being as Anna is, in Tolstoy's (nearly) perfectly controlled world. In fact, Tolstoy's performance, when looked into, betrays not only wilfulness but a devious kind of sadistic power, especially where, in the later parts of his novel, he *now*?! brings Anna back to herself, "necessarily" by then in circumstances that have left her pathetically broken. She has been mercilessly ravaged by the near-complete insecurity and loneliness of her hopelessly stringent situation with Vronsky. There has been no proper divorce; there has been no divorce. Over and against her continued hope in a more balanced and shared life with Vronsky—more than understandably considering the tremendous limitations of movement in the social sphere that have been put on *her*, not to mention all the suffering she has been through and the excruciating sacrifice she has made of her beloved son—in line with Tolstoy's formula of the necessary subversion of Anna at every turn, Vronsky is brought forth as strenuously defending "his [own!] right to freedom" (666).[151] But before she is at last consigned to her

[151] In the scene in question, this is admittedly a phrase attributed to Anna's thought, but the phrase corresponds precisely to the reality. Anna will elaborate on it: "He has the right to go off wherever and whenever he wants. Not only to go off but to abandon me. He has all the rights and I have none. But, knowing that, he shouldn't have"—i.e., gone off, at least not without more sensitivity to a situation become almost impossibly difficult for her. In the meantime, Anna is challenged by Vronsky even over the English girl whose education Anna has taken in hand—"your concern for this girl … I can see it's unnatural," although this is an initiative which is giving Anna some sense of new purpose and a worthy place in life. Naturally, she fixes on "the cruelty with which he destroyed the world she had so laboriously built up for herself in order to endure her difficult life. The unfairness with which he accused her of being false and unnatural…" (741). But she has, in any case, already brought her hopeless plight into focus for herself: "Do I live? I don't live. I wait for a denouement that keeps being postponed" (704). She is, after all, in Tolstoy's hands.

horrible death (we are at this point only some 60 pages away from this death in a novel that runs for 768 pages up to that point), Tolstoy *now* revives Anna in all of her unmatched splendor! and, what's more, makes Levin! himself, Tolstoy's own idea of a hero in this novel, mediate this to us:

> *'Yes, yes, what a woman!' thought Levin, forgetting himself and gazing fixedly at her beautiful, mobile face… And Levin saw another new feature in this woman whom he found so extraordinarily to his liking. Besides intelligence, grace, beauty, there was truthfulness in her. She did not want to conceal from him all the difficulty of her situation … and it was as if her face, acquiring a stern expression, suddenly turned to stone. With this expression, she was still more beautiful than before; but this was a new look; it was outside the realm of expressions, radiant with happiness, and giving happiness … Levin … felt a tenderness and pity for her that surprised him … and all the while thought about her, about her inner life, trying to guess her feelings. And he who had formerly judged her so severely, now, by some strange train of thought, justified her and at the same time pitied her, and feared that Vronsky did not understand her.* (698-701)

This may look like a parting tribute to Anna, or even an attempt to raise her to tragic stature, when on the verge of her final end: still "radiant with happiness, and giving happiness" etc. But in the light, or rather darkness, of her near-complete reduction by Tolstoy over virtually all the rest of her story, right up to this point and indeed beyond, this comes across rather as a last twist of the knife. Having achieved her near-complete humiliation in the rest, Tolstoy *now* restores her to herself!? when all has been forever lost? restores her in all the wonder on which some greater passionate life might and should have been built, and which has been ruthlessly, wilfully, totally denied us by Tolstoy? Instead of such "love" in her as arises out of her whole being, which would need be freed and had every right to be freed, and which would certainly have fully justified itself given any possibility of doing so, however problematic the consequences of such an expression of "love" might be in such a world, Tolstoy gives us the "fallen" woman, the woman of overwhelmingly shamed "repentance," and necessarily, of course, the "punished child." Right through the whole of the rest of her story, we continue to hear, from out of her inevitable humiliation, those most terrible thoughts of hers, registered early on when all has already become clear to her:

> ***She wept that her dream of clarifying, of defining her situation was destroyed for ever****. She knew beforehand that everything would stay as it had been, and would even be far worse than it had been … She would never experience the freedom of love, but would forever remain a criminal wife … it was so terrible that she could not even imagine how it would end. And she wept without restraint, as punished children weep.* (293)

Punished, and so how could she not be still further reduced at last to punishing in her turn? This otherwise most understanding and enlightened of women, if only she had been left to being herself, is now conceived bent on an act of revenge that would make Vronsky "regret" (753) his wilful refusal to understand even what has been left to them as a life. Passion-love, Tolstoy assures himself, will have no way through the world, and Anna, this free being of love, whom he has for his own purposes wilfully released from his unconscious, will have also had to be brought under the rule of the only one he could allow to reign supreme over the human scene—i.e., himself. In spite of which, Anna's haunting words continue to ring through to us through the decades, themselves a torment subverting her tormentor:

> *God has made me so that I must love and live!*
>
> (292)

The astonishing plethora of superlatives that have been spoken of Anna by virtually every other character over the course of this long novel's narrative, in spite of the author's own wilful intentions in her regard, likewise as so many ghostly voices remain and, at a touch, rise up to condemn the stony[152] mind out of which they have slipped, beyond Tolstoy's ability to fathom or take possession of what had been set loose.

Not all is in the control of the Olympian cynical power.

Tolstoy, the Olympian, could not in the end have it all his own way.

The question, however, may still be asked: what, then, could Anna have done to advance herself in her own set of values, contradicting as these do, so openly and insistently, her society's mores? A first answer to this question would be: 'nothing at all,' given the state of things in Tolstoy's novel as we finally have it. But it is precisely the role and power of the novelist to *create* his own world, and it is to the novelist in this freedom to create, that we must finally appeal. I am no novelist, but one answer to our question would be: 'by making the *son* settle things,' by his insisting, without the possibility of being contradicted, on his being with his mother, for it is only too clear that his choice would be his mother. In this way, a whole other life could have opened up; pressure could have been put also on the other side of the social-moral issue, and the conflict between the two sides thus explored more truthfully and objectively. Anna would then also have had a fair share of her claims to truthful living as she conceives of this.[153] But as it is, Tolstoy did nothing to further Anna's cause. Anna is hopelessly

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[152] Cf. Levin's account above: "*and it was as if her face, acquiring a stern expression, suddenly turned to stone.*"

[153] Would it have been so unthinkable for a great artist in the Russia of that time to imagine that Anna's son could go with her?

locked into the only way Tolstoy could conceive of his society, to which he was subservient, in the sense that he could not think his way very far beyond it. The novel's situation is, very simply, *made* hopeless for Anna: everything is already determined, and remains the same, and Anna from very early on, once it is established that she will not have her son, sees for herself that all will remain the same, so that the walls are bound to cave in on her eventually, slowly and inexorably. The social order takes all control of her situation, and we forget that it is Tolstoy who has had it so.

In the early scene of their first love-making moment, in which Anna is reduced (by Tolstoy) to a frantic shameful degradation, Vronsky is presented (also by Tolstoy) as having, in their act, "murdered" her, which may be thought as already a somewhat morbid view of the matter, but that Vronsky's intention to bring Anna back in this moment to a consciousness of the love between them that has brought them together—that this intention should be presented additionally as a case of "cutting [Anna's murdered] body into pieces" (149), this is take a morbid view of their love to an extreme point that can only expose this author further as for his intentions, which here go beyond any idea of a social order:

> *And as the murderer falls upon this body with animosity, as if with passion, drags it off and cuts it up, so he covered her face and shoulders with kisses. She held his hand and did not move. Yes, these kisses were what had been bought by this shame.*
>
> (149-150)

This was to take the moralistic reduction of passion-love very far indeed. Tolstoy's narration, of course, makes Anna into an "accomplice" (150) in this deed: "She held his hand … [s]he raised this hand, and kissed it." And so, the Anna whom Tolstoy will have created (who will have been projected out of his mind, outstandingly, as the noblest woman of his making), we are asked to believe, is this same Anna who seeks to be "murdered," and who seeks to be "cut up into pieces"?! We are really asked to believe this?![154]

[154] To the extent that Tolstoy is engaged in a deliberate and, at various points, wholesale reduction of Anna in this novel, his reductionist purpose can be referred further to what has been described as his general tendency to "iconoclasm" in his art, in which inevitably "each character in turn is seen corroded," for example in the final sections of *War and Peace*. Of this tendency it is said that "the effect is nearly macabre." (George Steiner in *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky*, Yale, 1996, orig., 1959, 109.) What I see in Tolstoy's treatment of Anna, however, is the opposite of the "honesty" ill-fittingly attributed to Tolstoy in this tendency. I have insinuated above an implicit (or not so implicit) intention in Tolstoy, in this characteristic tendency, in the end to dictate *himself* to the world.

# PART V

# *On Dostoevski's "Demons" (formerly "The Possessed") and the Limits of Nihilism*

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In his Letter on the XV$^{th}$ Arcanum of the Tarot[155], Valentin Tomberg singles Dostoevski out for "releas[ing] into the world … certain secret practical methods of evil" (*Meditations* 402), especially in the case of his novel *The Possessed*[156]. Tomberg sees Dostoevski's effort as a form of misguided zeal, exercised from a desire, prevalent among "many authors," to "'do their best' with respect to depth and penetration in their treatment … of the secrets of evil." Tomberg's main point in his Letter is that, in treating the subject of evil, one must proceed with circumspection and a very necessary "distance"; otherwise one risks being overtaken by the very evil one seeks to understand:

> *One ought not to occupy oneself with evil, other than in keeping a certain distance and a certain reserve, if one wishes to avoid the risk of paralyzing the creative élan and a still greater risk—that of furnishing arms to the powers of evil. One can grasp profoundly, i.e., intuitively, only that which one loves … Now, one cannot love evil … One can understand it only at a distance, as an* ***observer*** *of its phenomenology*. (403)

One cannot say that Dostoevski is not himself a strict, or at least an ironic, observer of the tendencies to evil as presented in *The Possessed* (perhaps also in all of his other novels)—and yet, Tomberg maintains his critique. It would appear to be a matter of what Dostoevski, in spite of his own distance from these tendencies, was nevertheless unveiling as practical methods that could (would) play into the hands of unscrupulous souls. It is probable that what Tomberg had in mind was what the novel brings forward as "Shigalyovism" (after the thought presented by the character, Shigalyov) as well as the further elaborations on this made by the revolutionary ring-leader, Pyotr Verkhovensky.[157] As Shigalyov outlines this (since, according to him, the time has come in history when humankind can now act in this fashion), the general social disorder endemic to the human race will be fixed once and for all by proceeding with a system that would permanently enslave the greatest part of the human population (9/10$^{ths}$ of it) leaving the rest (1/10$^{th}$) in charge. Human liberty, according to Shigalyov, implies equality,

[155] See his Letter on "The Devil."
[156] More recently translated as *Demons*.
[157] For the relevant texts see Dostoevski, p.401ff and p.417ff.

but equality, given what human nature has been shown to be, cannot be achieved finally without despotism (this is the paradox of his system, which he says leads him to a despair that is yet inevitable!) Equality can only be created in fact by *eliminating* differences in the masses, and this requires the total suppression of all individual talents and dispositions to mental advancement ("higher abilities" (Dostoevski 417) of every kind, as Verkhovensky will put it, in his own more frankly cynical elaborations on the system).

Keeping the masses subjected and in ignorance was no new idea, even if it flew directly in the face of the developments in social emancipation that had been growing in the last few centuries in Europe and even in Russia itself (the serfs had already been emancipated by the time of the novel's action). What is new in the solutions of Shigalyov and Verkhovensky is the commitment to a systematic application of this idea, which dictated that the main mass of the human population be denied all opportunities for personal development even from infancy: "first, the level of education, science and talents is lowered" (Dostoevski 417); "we'll stifle every genius in infancy" (418). This first level of effort would be accompanied, among other things, by the systematic elimination of authors—such as Cicero, Copernicus, and Shakespeare (symbolic, respectively, of oratorical power, the analytical eye, and imagination—417); there would follow upon this "a re-educating of entire generations" (404). More than this, as for the 9/10$^{ths}$ of the human population: "[t]hese must lose their person" (403); there would be the additional application, at a second level, to a systematic process of biological regression that would reduce this population, over a few generations ("through a series of regenerations," as it is put!), to a state of pure animal comfort, such as would evoke the "primeval innocence, something like the primeval paradise" (403-404). Such a world would offer all the satisfaction that would be needed to pacify the masses—"though, by the way," Verkhovensky adds conveniently, "they will have to work." (To add reality to this idea, Verkhovensky cites the contemporary case of English workers who brought all things down to a simple situation: "'We've learned a trade, and we're honest people; we don't need anything else'"—418.) In this new society, everyone would also be "obliged" to spy on everyone else (417), on the principle that "[e]ach belongs to all and all to each." Moreover, every so often, "every thirty years," there would be a carefully perpetrated "convulsion": "they all suddenly start devouring each other, up to a certain point, simply so as not to be bored" (418).

If Shigalyov hits upon the system, Verkhovensky has thought out the means for realizing it. First, one sets out to recruit all the disenchanted and miscreant portions of the existing population ("[l]isten, I've counted them all up"; "we're already terribly strong now"; "an awful lot of them are ours"—419-20), everyone, in short, who is in violent revolt against the world. One then enlists these miscreants as parts of a network of wrecking "crews": "I'll find such

zealots for you in these same 'crews' as would be ready for any kind of shooting and would even be grateful for the honor" (421). Thus, Verkhovensky boasts, "[w]e'll proclaim destruction": "[w]e'll set fires going": "[s]uch a heaving will set in such as the world has never seen." No very sophisticated ideas will be necessary to whip up such a population: "[d]o you know, do you know, how much we can achieve with little ready-made ideas alone?" (420). The still more chilling view is then voiced that to fully dispense with the old world order and to fully bring in the new, a general moral debasement of the population will have to be sustained over some time: "one or two generations of depravity are necessary now, an unheard of, mean little depravity, that turns men into vile, cowardly, cruel, self-loving slime—that's what's needed!" (420).

Finally, from the midst of this intentionally generated, willed immorality, at the most opportune time will be brought forth a political Savior, one whom the people in the meantime will have been "weeping for" (421). Verkhovensky believes he has found this Savior in the aristocratic Stavrogin who is indeed a powerfully enigmatic character and the main character in Dostoevski's novel. At this point, Verkhovensky confides his purposes to Stavrogin himself: "you're beautiful, proud as a god, seeking nothing for yourself, with the halo of a victim" (422); "you have the air of being everyone's equal, yet everyone is afraid of you" (419); "[i]t's nothing for you to sacrifice life, your own or someone else's. You are precisely what's needed. I, I need precisely such a man as you." This consummately endowed Leader will also be preceded by carefully spun legends about him: "He exists, but no one has seen him, he's in hiding … it's even possible to show you, for example, to some one person out of a hundred thousand. And it will start spreading all over the earth" (422): "a new force is on the way" (421), "and such a force, unheard-of" (422). In this way does Verkhovensky anticipate a new order being created around one emblematic Leader, including those around him elitely chosen to govern the subjected masses of the rest of the population. "[S]ocialism" by contrast has never been able to "bring in" any new order, in spite of its vehement critique of the old.

I am unable to say to what extent Dostoevski's outline of such a systematic purpose in *The Possessed* would have directly influenced social-political practice in the Soviet Union from the time of the Revolution onwards, though there have been many studies that have claimed Dostoevski's role in prophesizing such a practice.[158] Certainly it looks like Tomberg imputed

[158] See, for example, F. Derek Chisholm, '*Demons' as a Prophecy of Lenin, Stalin and the Foundations of Russian Communism* (www.fyodordostoevsky.com/essays/d-chisholm.html). Chisholm quotes Dmitri Volgokonov, *Lenin: A New Biography* (New York: Free Press, 1994), pp.2-3: "In power Lenin proved to be much like the fictional Pyotr Verkhovensky figure in Dostoevsky's *Demons* … He [Lenin] hated … the entire old world, and therefore … it had to be swept away." Chisholm also remarks that the purges of the 1930s under Stalin were in their own horrific way a fulfilment of Verkhovensky's notion that at some point in the revolutionary process

to Dostoevski some form of causal influence (as distinct from prophetic) on the eventual emergence of such "practical methods of evil," whether in the Soviet Union or elsewhere.[159] That such methods, and indeed far worse, were practised after his time is, of course, not in question, but rather the extent to which Dostoevski may be said to have been responsible for these developments by broaching these methods himself. (It is, of course, possible that Tomberg had in mind the effect well into the future on any and all readers of Dostoevski's novel, especially those banded together for cynical political ends. One is struck, in the meantime, by the remarkable congruency of Dostoevski's presentation with the sobering account given recently of the anticipated appearance in some near future of a world Dictator out of the fearful chaos of our own time.[160]) Certainly, for all the irony Dostoevski expresses about the revolutionary pretensions throughout his novel, his presentation remains far from

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what would be needed is a systematic killing off of the population. (See Dostoevski, 405 where Verkhovensky is implicitly associated with this notion.) There is also N. A. Berdyaev's *Spirits of the Russian Revolution*, a better known study of the prophetic connection between Dostoevski and the Revolution (http://www.berdyaev.com/berdiaev/berd_lib/1918_299.html). With its immediate application to the features I have outlined above, Berdyaev's study zeroes in on Dostoevski's prophetic insights in *Demons*, describing how "[h]e foresaw the inevitability of the demonic-possession within the revolution," "[the] frenzied circular whirling" that Berdyaev defines as "Russian maximalism" characterized especially by its "infernal passion for a worldwide levelling" and its destruction of "the freedom of the person." What will now prevail is, rather, a "collective consciousness … regarded higher than the personal" and whose "cement, binding it all together, is shame at having an opinion of one's own."

[159] A prophetic role would imply that Dostoevski marked out a practice that, inevitably or not, came into existence later, in some degree along the lines of his account. A causal role would imply that future revolutionary practice *learned* from Dostoevski's account and emerged to some extent because of him. Certainly Tomberg's comments raise the issue of how far an artist or any public (and even private) commentator can go in representing the methodic possibilities of evil. He seems to assume that these should be noted (observed) outside oneself but not otherwise gone into very deeply, let alone laid out as Dostoevski does here. The focus should rather be on what can divert from such possibilities by way of a positive counter-development. It could, of course, be argued that one might be doing good by alerting to such possibilities, but it would be just as likely that, in the meantime, certain people would have learned and been inspired by possibilities they would not have otherwise thought up themselves.

[160] See Robert Powell, *Prophecy, Phenomena, Hope* (Great Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne, 2009): "In the present world a condition of perpetual war, based on fear-mongering owing to the 'threat of terror,' provides an atmosphere in which longing arises subconsciously for a 'world savior' who will be able to restore peace on Earth" (37). In this context, however, what will be offered is a frighteningly false peace. Powell's book was written with the intention of helping us recognize "the signature" (12) of this coming individuality who will work principally through an especially subtle form of "deception" (20). In his presentation Powell builds on the prophecies of Daniel Andreev in his *Rosa Mira*, and he quotes Andreev as to the nature of this deception; Andreev's terms strongly suggest those in which Dostoevski presents Stavrogin: "He will be uniquely and terribly beautiful … it will be difficult to place him in any particular race or nation. Rather, he will be seen as a representative of the collective of humanity" (23; see also 85-86). All of the principal characters implicated in the social chaos of Dostoevski's novel (Shatov, Kirillov, Verkhovensky) wish to recruit Stavrogin, each from his own understanding of what their world urgently requires in the way of a leader.

unambiguous. It would, in the first place, still be possible to learn from Dostoevski's accounts of such methods regardless of the irony that also hedges them. Moreover, it is easy to see how Dostoevski's breakdown of the methods of evil would have an impact also because his irony is strangely understated, Dostoevski's point of view, it has struck me, being more neutral or less actively critical than the irony would lead us to believe. There is more than one might think, in his point of view, of what one might describe as a residual dismay, at the fact that such methods could be thought out and easily *take hold* of human minds. It seems to me to go farther even than this. Dostoevski would appear to have felt himself still caught up in the lure such methods could have, having been disposed to something like a commitment to them at one time in his early adulthood.

Twenty years earlier, Dostoevski had been under the spell of an extraordinary personality on whom his Stavrogin is based, a handsome aristocrat and social revolutionary by the name of Nicolai Speshnyov, to whom Dostoevski was for a time, in fact, personally bound.[161] Dostoevski's association with Speshnyov and his group made him a "Petrashevist." The immediate circumstances that got Dostoevski started with the writing of his novel involved the recent murder of a young student named Ivanov by another student leader of their revolutionary group named Nechaev, respectively the Shatov and the Verkhovensky of Dostoevski's novel (like Ivanov, Shatov reneges on his commitment to the revolutionary cause, Shatov citing, among other things, a failure of real love of Russia among the revolutionaries of his group, most notably Verkhovensky; the latter then conceives of Shatov's murder, as a way of re-affirming the revolutionary loyalty of the group, though also conspicuously in order to bind the remaining members of the group through the guilt of association). Musing over his novel after it was written, Dostoevski remarks:

> *"I am an old 'Nechaevist' myself[;] … you will say … I am not a Nechaevist at all, and that I am only a 'Petrashevist' … But how do you know that the Petrashevists could not have become Nechaevists, i.e. have taken the 'Nechaevist' path, if things had turned that way? … I probably could never have become a Nechaev but a Nechaevist I cannot guarantee …"* (Dostoevski x)

[161] Speshnyov was the cynosure of the Petrashevsky circle of the 1840s which was "intent on preparing the Russian people for a general uprising" (Pevear in his Introduction to *Demons*, Dostoevski, ix). Dostoevski was part of this group (and indeed would be arrested and imprisoned for his membership in it, almost going to execution). At the time, he rhapsodized about "[t]he wondrous fate of that man [i.e., Speshnyov]; wherever and however he makes his appearance, the most unconstrained, the most impervious people immediately surround him with devotion and respect." Dostoevski once borrowed money from Speshnyov which the latter would not take back "in money" (Dostoevski x).

Richard Pevear has glossed Dostoevski's remarkable confession here as a case of his acknowledging the power of "a state of inner servitude that might have made him an accomplice in murder" (x). There is, indeed, much to explore in the nature of this "inner servitude," which has much to do with the epoch of time in which such developments could emerge—on which more below (pp.152-153). For the moment, one might cite as a concomitant of this "servitude" a certain form of experience of "intoxication" on which Dostoevski expands through the Stavrogin of his novel. In a chapter that was taken out of the novel by Dostoevski's publisher because of its overly disturbing nature (the chapter "At Tikhon's"), Stavrogin confesses to his fascination with a certain form of sophisticated satisfaction which he derived from this "intoxication":

> *"Every extremely shameful, immeasurably humiliating, mean, and, above all, ridiculous position I have happened to get into in my life has always aroused in me, along with the boundless wrath, an unbelievable pleasure. Exactly the same as in moments of crime, or in moments threatening to life. If I was stealing something, I would feel … intoxication from the awareness of the depth of my meanness. It was not the meanness that I loved … but I liked the intoxication from the tormenting awareness of my baseness … [T]he same shameful and violent sensation … I confess I often sought … out myself …"* (Dostoevski 692-693)

Here Stavrogin shifts to cases in which he deliberately made of himself a victim rather than the perpetrator of such actions: he claims that in these cases "if the wrath can be restrained," which will be one's first reaction, "the pleasure will exceed anything imaginable" (693). He gives the example of a fight he got into once in which he happened to be the victor, adding that if his opponent had, yet, "seized his hair and pulled me down, I would have felt intoxication and perhaps not even wrath." Today, in our post-psychoanalytic era, one speaks of this as the masochistic complex, and perhaps this is also what Tomberg had in mind when he singled out Dostoevski for "releas[ing] into the world … certain secret practical methods of evil." Dostoevski was giving a more conscious, deliberate form to the expression of a complex that, no doubt, had been indulged in a widespread, if more unconscious, way earlier in history. Stavrogin singles himself out precisely for this peculiar form of experience of the complex: "All this so that everyone will know that this feeling never subjected the whole of me, but there was always full consciousness left (and it was all based in consciousness!)" (693). It is here as if Dostoevski were himself advertising the fact of this difference in consciousness with what had been known previously in history, which appeared to him, therefore, to constitute something in the nature of an original discovery. This is just the sort of in-depth exploration of evil that Tomberg would appear to have thought should not be publicly voiced or "released into the world," at least quite so straightforwardly.

"Intoxication," as it happens, is the principal theme in Tomberg's account of the nature and influence of evil in his Letter. Tomberg, in fact, specifically addresses "the intoxicating impulse of radicalism" (410), which he otherwise describes as "a fever of the will and imagination to change everything utterly in a single stroke," by "arrang"-ing and "re-arrang"-ing "social, political and cultural things in a certain manner" (409). Tomberg speaks of a certain degree of "intoxication of the will and imagination" which, in this way, "engenders demons" (410). Pevear in his Introduction to Dostoevski's novel likewise alludes to "the would-be autonomous human will" (xxi) as the "source" of the generation of "demons." Tomberg is quite clear that such demons are "artificial beings" (404), though they are no less "creations" (407) for that, having in fact a frightful autonomy all their own: "engendered subjectively, they become forces independent of the subjective consciousness that engendered them … objectifications[s] of that which takes its origin in subjective consciousness" (407). Pevear, citing Bakhtin[162], invokes the notion of "idea-forces" (xvii) that generate "the possibility of an evil or alien idea coming to inhabit a person, misleading him, perverting him ontologically" (Dostoevski xviii). Such ideas will "behave strangely" (xix) because they are both unreal *and* active; Pevear notes additionally that such ideas, because unreal, even behave laughably; "[t]hey introduce a dreadful buffoonery into the world" (xxi) creative of "a very serious state of parody." This account finely acknowledges an additional subtlety to Dostoevski's presentation in his novel which, from this point of view, is appropriately described as "a blistering comedy of ideas run amok"[163]. The comedy vanishes, however, once these ideas turn into acts of destruction and murder.

What we have described thus far addresses the "ideological" pretensions of the main revolutionaries in Dostoevski's novel, Verkhovensky especially, but also his immediate associates including Shigalyov, Stavrogin himself more distantly—Stavrogin having, over time, come into the understanding that all is pointless, as we shall see; Berdyaev includes also the renegade Shatov in this group[164]. However, even the more innocent characters who are not involved in the novel's revolutionary activity are implicated, being in their case possessed by "[d]emons who have not arrived at the stage of objectification," to quote Tomberg (*Meditations* 407)—such demons occupying a "semi-autonomous existence … designated in modern psychology by the term 'psychological complex'." (Here I am making my own application from Tomberg to Dostoevski's novel.) All of the other characters, including those who are non-revolutionary, are driven by forces in the ego or from the unconscious over which they,

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[162] See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems in Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and tr. Caryl Emerson (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1984).

[163] See the backcopy to Dostoevski, *Demons*.

[164] See http://www.berdyaev.com/berdiaev/berd_lib/1918_299.html

likewise, have no control. Demonic influences of a vaguer, more tenuous sort are strangely at play even amongst these. As in the case of the novel's revolutionaries, these characters have also been taken over—as I aim to show, in the case of all— for lack of *any* sense of an actual basis any longer to their existence, which has been taken out from under them. This tragic feature to the action in Dostoevski's novel would seem to have to do, spiritually-speaking, with the exceptionally impoverished period of time into which Dostoevski's characters have come, as Dostoevski himself experienced this—on which more in the section that follows (three paragraphs from here).

True to his view, Tomberg immediately proceeds in his Letter to bring forward the spiritual counter-developments to these demonic tendencies in human nature. He appeals to what he describes as the "immutable reality" of "traditional doctrine" (417) and our individual responsibility to this:

> *Let us resign ourselves, therefore, to the "great work" of contributing constructively to tradition—the spiritual, Christian, Hermetic, scientific tradition. Let us thoroughly immerse ourselves in it, let us study it, let us practise it; lastly, let us cultivate it, i.e., let us work not in order to overthrow but in order to build.* (409)

We are to "build" as Tomberg was building in *Meditations on the Tarot* (an effort in which we are asked to participate directly). "Resign" ("Let us resign ourselves") will seem a strange word here, but it is used in the context of the profound appeal Tomberg has just made for the need to silence ourselves in this human nature:

> *Let us make our arbitrary will and imagination silent; let us impose on them the discipline of silence … **To be silent** is, above all, the great magical commandment of not engendering demons through our arbitrary will and imagination …* (409)

The task of coming to terms with one's inner demons only begins from this point, but, according to Tomberg there is already much to hope for from silently enduring, as I shall indicate. Significantly, Tomberg also acknowledges the need for "rest" from the process: "time during which one is left in peace by demons, i.e., time during which they are absent" (422). This is made possible by recourse to methods of "sacred magic" as sanctified by "tradition," among which he cites a certain precise use of the sign of the Cross[165]. There is also recourse to holy places, miraculous relics, and consecrated water, which exercise their power in us precisely by taking us beyond any process of will or imagination in the human being, the energy

[165] One "make[s] the sign of the Cross towards the north, south, east and west, each time saying the first two verses of Psalm 68 (from David): 'Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered;/let those who hate him flee before him!'" (422).

they radiate originating rather from above, being "places or objects where 'heaven opens and Angels are able to ascend and descend'" (420). Tomberg makes much of the protective, counter-active power and influence of Angels, most notably in the Letter that precedes the one we are presently focused on. This is the XIV$^{th}$ Letter, on Temperance, where the role especially of our individual guardian Angels is described. But the time will come when we ourselves must accomplish the work of combatting our inner demons (here Tomberg invokes a tradition that dates back to Origen in the 3$^{rd}$ century A.D., whom he cites for "the teaching concerning the 'liberation of Angels through man'"—412-413[166]). Thus, in a second stage, are human beings thrust back upon their "solitude and isolation" (413), where it will seem to them at first that they have no further way to go. With its significant bearing on the import of Dostoevski's action in this novel (the application from Tomberg to Dostoevski is, once again, my own), Tomberg quotes a passage from St. John of the Cross. The time for human beings to confront themselves having come, they are left at first "'in such darkness that they do not know which way to turn in their discursive imaginings … now that the sensory faculties are engulfed in this night'" (415). Here there follow "more and more subtle temptations" (414) until we reach a final, consummate state that invokes "the despair of nothing—complete and supreme nihilism." There emerges at this point a doubt-full experience that Tomberg illuminates with reference to the close account given by St. Teresa of Avila:

> *"Not only is the soul left in great dryness, but there is also a certain disquiet … and … it is not easy to know where it comes from. The soul seems to resist the experience and is upset and afflicted without knowing why …* [it] *is left in a kind of bewilderment and most perturbed … it becomes restless and touchy and suffers nothing but bad effects …"* (415-416)

But then comes a light in the darkness:

> *"A soul is suffering all the sorrow and disquiet I have described: the mind is darkened and dry; but is* [then, suddenly and miraculously] *set at peace, freed from all trouble and filled with light, merely by hearing the words: '**Be not troubled**'. These* [words] *deliver it from all its pains, although before if the whole world and all its learned men had united to persuade it that there was no cause for grief, it could not, in spite of all its efforts, get rid of its sadness …"* (416)

'Be not troubled' and the final peace that comes from these words spoken by Christ is precisely what I would say Dostoevski was unable to manage as an experience, and the

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[166] Thus Origen: "'But we must not always rely on the Angels to fight for us; they help us only at the beginning when we ourselves are commencing. With the progress of time, we should arm ourselves for combat … [St.] Paul cried to us, saying: 'Take the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand the wiles of the devil' … 'Gird yourself' …'" (413).

consequence of that is clear from what his characters have to suffer, most notably Stavrogin in the novel we are considering (but also ultimately both Ivan and Dimitri in *The Brothers Karamazov* and Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment*). It was not a matter of what Dostoevski was personally suffering but of a greater failure in his period of time as a whole which is reflected in his own experience (so finely attuned was Dostoevski to his time, artistically-speaking). For this was towards the very end of the Age of Kali Yuga when the world stood most darkly in its death-throes, before the new Age of Light was born out of which Tomberg himself writes. All spiritual direction seemed cut off for a certain large portion of humanity, perhaps in some deeper sense for the whole of it; it is, at least, the fundamental condition Dostoevski's characters have inherited in his novel (and, in fact, generally in his novels), with the dire consequences I have alluded to. Confronted with the void of their "solitude and isolation," each in his or her own world, Dostoevski's characters find themselves led only by such impulses of ego and from the unconscious that are left to them, which the novel would show stir up nothing but a strange, parodic devils' play of inconsequential thoughts and feelings. This is true also of the less prominent figures in Dostoevski's novel, including characters who are not connected to the revolutionary 'cause', as well as those more loosely associated with the 'revolutionaries', who are likewise clueless as to what they would seek. (See in the case of the first group the two "Fête" chapters and in the case of the second the chapter "With Our People.") A general inconsequence in thought and feeling is more glaringly obvious in the more prominent figures, and especially in the novel's main character, Stavrogin.

There is in his case, in the first place, impasse in what might be described as the 'high cultural' sphere. This has to do with the (faintly 'demented') religious "lame girl"[167], Marya, whom Stavrogin willfully marries. He does so from an impulse to prove himself in a capacity for religious loyalty based on a special form of "noble" sentiment (an extreme case of aristocratic *noblesse oblige*).[168] In spite of their being married, however, they have always lived apart and have not seen each other for years, not since the marriage. In the meantime, Stavrogin has been supporting her financially. When they meet again for the first time, in public in front of his family and associates (who for the most part do not know of his marriage and who see in her simply a pitiful wretch and an outcast of society), his noble sentiment is a clue to his motives:

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[167] The title given to one of the novel's chapters.

[168] Stavrogin's mother can understand the case: "'And so he meets there a creature offended by everyone, a cripple, half crazy … with the noblest feelings! … he is not laughing at her like everyone else! Oh, people! You do not understand that he should protect her from her offenders, surround her with respect 'like a marquise' …'" (Dostoevski 190).

> *Nicolai Vsevolodovich* [i.e., Stavrogin] *spoke to her in a caressing, melodious voice, and an extraordinary tenderness shone in his eyes. He stood before her in a most reverent attitude, and his every movement expressed the most sincere respect.* (Dostoevski 183)

However, Shatov, who over this time has developed a special protective affection for Marya, will accuse Stavrogin of more complex intentions:

> *"Do you know why you married so disgracefully and basely then? Precisely because here the disgrace and senselessness reached the point of genius! … You married out of a passion for torture, out of a passion for remorse, out of moral sensuality … The challenge to common sense was too enticing!"* (Dostoevski 254)

To this Stavrogin replies that Shatov is only partly right (he puts it negatively: "you are partly mistaken about the reasons for my marriage"). In despair from life's moral-imaginative inconsequence, Stavrogin had allowed himself some very dubious attitudes and actions, and by his marriage meant to make up for this and to recover himself. By then, however, the darkly sensual nature to which he had succumbed had gotten the upper hand, and it continued to shape his motives also in the case of the marriage, as Shatov's remarks indicate. When Marya and Stavrogin meet again in private for the first time in years, she sees through to his spiritual failure. She has caught him staring at her in an expression of "loathing" (272):

> *"And why did you get scared then, as you walked in? Who frightened you then? As soon as I saw your mean face, when I fell and you picked me up—it was as if a worm crept into my heart: not him, I thought, it's not him! My falcon would never be ashamed of me … tonight, as you came in, you pulled out your knife!"* (277-278)

Marya here speaks metaphorically, but it is indeed the case that Stavrogin has allowed himself to be distantly fascinated by the thought of her being done away with in some way. Stavrogin knows that Verkhovensky has been ruminating such a deed, for an association with Marya would not make for a good social image in the role Verkhovensky intends for him. Verkhovensky purposes to associate him rather with the "beautiful" Lizaveta who, contrastingly, would make an admirable consort to him as the Revolution's appointed Leader.[169]

Yet also in the case of the 'romantic' there is impasse for Stavrogin. Not that Liza is not in love with Stavrogin but that he cannot finally bring himself to love her (524). They discover this finally at their one climactic tryst in the novel (519ff). In spite of his already knowing this

[169] "'You are the chief, you are the force. I'll just be at your side, a secretary. You know, we shall board our bark, and her oars will be of maple, and her sails of silk, and in the stern there sits a beautiful maiden, the fair Lizaveta Nikoleavna …'" (Dostoevski 385).

at some level, Stavrogin has proposed to run off with Liza (521); he had offered to do the same with Marya (276) until she saw through him; he will offer to do the same later with Darya, his mother's young servant, in whom he finds a soul who is ready to comfort him (she has said as much, being herself in love with Stavrogin) when all will have come to naught for him (see 291-292, also 525). Clearly Stavrogin is desperate to find himself in one or the other of these three options (the 'high cultural', the 'romantic', a life of 'compassionate' association), each of which seems to hold possible fulfilment for him, though in all three cases he is unable to come through. The offer to Darya is made toward the end of the novel (674), but by then too much has transpired for Stavrogin to believe in this offer. Marya has indeed been murdered (though Verkhovensky professes not to have been part of it), while Liza, intent on looking on the dead Marya at the scene of the crime, for she feels responsible for her death, having learned from Stavrogin that he did nothing to stop the crime even when he thought it might really happen—Liza herself gets pummelled to death, by the crowd at the scene who assume her collusion in the murder with Stavrogin. (When Stavrogin proposes to run off with Liza he has not yet learned of the murder of Marya.) All does come to nothing for them all, while in the meantime a number of other, more natural forms of compassionate association are likewise severely placed as for their limitations, because of the failure of these forms also to suggest a life with any firm basis. There is the compassionate love Varvara (Stavrogin's mother) finally allows herself to express freely, if still ironically, towards Stefan (Stavrogin's tutor in youth), a confession that comes too late, as Stefan is dying. For twenty years they have lived alongside each other in love, without acknowledging it, given rather to egotistic irritableness and squabbling with each other to the point where Varvara at last disowns him. Likewise there is the reunion of Shatov with his estranged wife. She seeks him out after a separation of three years, turning to him for help to deliver her baby (who may even be Stavrogin's child). Shatov is all readiness and fond attention to her; she is successfully delivered of the child, but some time before she is, Shatov is called away, by Verkhovensky who has insisted that Shatov fulfil one last task before he is set free. Shatov is then murdered by Verkhovensky and his crew as payback for his dissociation from the group. Shatov's past, being the revolutionary life he had chosen at one time, in this way catches up to him to claim him for itself.

It has all been devils' play without the characters realizing it, nor does it appear that they have any possibility of transcending the world they occupy. What the novel's narrator has to say about the town in which the action is set has a broader application to the lives of all the characters of this world:

> *There was among us … a general irritation, something unappeasably spiteful; it seemed everyone was terribly sick of everything. Some sort of general, muddled cynicism had come to reign, a forced, as if strained, cynicism.* (Dostoevski 461)

An inevitable development follows from this:

> *Always and everywhere, in a troubled time, of hesitation or transition, various trashy sorts appear … This scum, which exists in every society, rises to the surface in any transitional time, and not only has no goal, but has not even the inkling of an idea, and itself merely expresses anxiety and impatience with all its might. And yet this scum, without knowing it, almost always falls under the command of that small group of the "vanguard" which acts with a definite goal …* (462)
>
> *What our troubled time consisted of, and from what to what our transition was—I do not know, and no one, I think, knows—except perhaps certain visitors from outside.*
>
> *… all this suddenly and fully gained the upper hand among us …*

In this context of general inconsequence, transposed to the social sphere, revolution and the intoxication that feeds it would be all too likely to step in to fill the void. Dostoevski's narrator presents all this as a recurring pattern in history, though it is also a distinctive, if inscrutable, fate for his time. I have invoked the fact that in the period in which Dostoevski was writing (twenty years after), humankind was coming to terms with the extreme reaches of Kali Yuga. Tomberg once went on record for saying that this moment in time had to do with Russia confronting the spiritual void in its own past (*Russian Spirituality* 180ff). Some thirty years before his *Meditations*, when he was still writing as an anthroposophist, Tomberg had put his finger on the import of Dostoevski's world generally:

> *Who can read "The Brothers Karamazov," "The Idiot," "The Possessed," and not become dizzy? On reading these works we feel that there is no ground underfoot or force of cohesion. Like phantoms* [his characters] *move about … all similar because all of them are mere masks, mere semblances, teetering over the abyss. In pointing to this truth, Dostoevsky showed two possible alternatives, the two ways for Russia: either this void will be filled by demons, or else Christ will be found. Either possession or enlightenment. These are the two ways Russia can go; a third possibility does not exist.* (*Russian Spirituality* 180)

Tomberg's account here would appear to assume the inevitability of Dostoevski's presentation, in contrast with his exposition of certain "practical methods of evil" that the later Tomberg claimed was gratuitous and dangerous. As for the "two ways for Russia" Tomberg speaks of, Dostoevski would seem to have aligned himself with the one ("enlightenment") but to have remained still very much dismayed by the other ("possession")—as we shall see. Russia's

history was all the more complicated because of the continued strong but ineffectual presence of the Russian Church in Dostoevski's time. Tomberg had seen this Church as itself in its death-throes, though he was careful to note that it was the substance that infused it and not the form of the Church that was dying:

> *This body is fragile and imperfect (not in its **form** as Creed, Sacraments, and Hierarchy, but in its **substance**: the human beings who fill out this form) … The **body** of Christianity is being destroyed. We can expect that it will be destroyed. It is heading for death.* (*Russian Spirituality* 120-121)

Dostoevski's presentation of the Russian Church in his novels seems to conform to Tomberg's account, in spite of the curious respect that Dostoevski additionally shows towards the Church, which leads him to what seems like an open investigation into what it might still be offering out of its own sphere as a solution to the period's metaphysical crisis.

This is apparent in *The Possessed* in his depiction of the "blessed" bishop, Tikhon, whom Stavrogin desperately visits for counsel in the hope of finding a solution to his condition (this in the chapter which Dostoevski's publisher removed because of what Stavrogin confesses to as his worst action). Tikhon fails to resolve Stavrogin's condition with his psychology, quite overwhelmed suddenly by the fear of what Stavrogin is contemplating as a way out (suicide). It is significant that, when Tikhon is thus overtaken with fear, he has gone off with his own idea of a solution: presuming to recruit the gifted Stavrogin to the monkhood, a typical obsession of the Church. Tikhon has gone off on his own path only to be suddenly brought back to the reality of this life's problems.[170] As for the psychology of the Church so in the substance of its spiritual life, as in the case of the "saintly" Zossima in *The Brothers Karamazov*, who despite the appearance of great holiness, gives off an especially bad odor from his body when he is dead! Much is made of this event, forcing all who are concerned to revise their estimation of Zossima. It is also to the point that Alyosha, perhaps Dostoevski's most eligible Christian, is seen to be running about through the whole of that novel still in his novice's outfit in which we leave him at the end …

According to Tomberg, what Dostoevski finally offered, which the Church of his time could not, was a proper form of "conscience" in the face of the period's great malaise. In his Letter on the XV$^{th}$ Arcanum, Tomberg sets us the task of bringing the demonic tendencies of our human nature into "the light of consciousness" (*Meditations* 421). This is the only way to finally free ourselves of them. Dostoevski can certainly be said in his novels to have brought demonic tendencies in our human nature into the light of his consciousness, and it is an

[170] As if by making a monk of himself (or just a "novice," as Tikhon says), Stavrogin would automatically resolve his life's anguish. Tikhon's idea is all the more unreal as he proposes that Stavrogin might assume this role "secretly" (713) while still living out in the world.

accomplishment of great genius; nevertheless there is a clear limit to what he accomplishes when one refers him further to Tomberg's ideal, as reflected in the case of St. Anthony the Great e.g., who was able to redemptorily take demons upon himself because his consciousness was "illumined from above" (421). It is highly questionable whether Dostoevski was himself "illumined from above"—at least when he was writing his novels. And yet his effort, according to Tomberg, was not purely psychological:

> *The writings of Dostoevsky are not just "psychological novels" in the sense that they describe peculiarities of soul. Rather, they describe the soul qualities* ***as they relate to conscience****.* (*Russian Spirituality* 159)

Tomberg speaks, in fact, of the presence in Dostoevski (and a few other "significant individuals" (122), "prominent *representatives* of Russian spiritual life" (118) at this time, among whom he singles out Solovyov and Tolstoi) of "an organic orientation toward Christ" (122) Who is seen as Himself "the highest *content* of conscience" (159). Tomberg claims that this is how the *spirit* of Eastern Christianity at this time (as opposed to its *body*, which was dying) was being carried forward as a potential future force of redemption. Yet here again one notes a severe limitation the moment one refers Dostoevski to the example of St. Teresa of Avila who could claim to have responded to the words Christ had spoken to her: "Be not troubled." Dostoevski for his part remained troubled, one might say even very troubled, in spite and even because of the great inroads he makes in understanding the operations of the demonic psyche.

Here I believe it is necessary to distinguish Dostoevski the man from the artist. As a man, there would seem to be no question that Dostoevski wished above all and in the end to be the very Christian Tomberg was saying he was in his innermost "mood of soul" (124). From his close personal association with and admiration of Solovyov, it seems clear that Dostoevski also wished to be a Sophianist (Sophia being, according to Tomberg, "the soul of the [Eastern] Church" at this time, as Christ was "the spirit of [that] Church"—120). Yet as an artist, or the writer of his novels, Dostoevski cannot be said to have reached, or given quite as much expression as we might wish, to either of these positions. Indeed the evidence points rather to a continuing dread of the extent of the demonic influence in human beings that leaves him, and us, in the end *still* in significant dismay.

Tomberg sees in Dostoevski, as in the rest of us, two primal spiritual forces at work:

> *Two powers meet together in the human breast: the destructive power of evil and the creative, light power of good. This meeting is a ceaseless battle in which first one pole, then the other, conquers.* (124)

Dostoevski *the creator of his characters* sees primarily the destructive power of evil at work, which indeed conquers them, and to an extent far beyond the power of good to make good again, at least for the moment. This seems to me true also in the case of the ending of *The Brothers Karamazov* in spite of all of Alyosha's (deliberately designed) exclamations of optimistic cheer. This cheer Dostoevski sets before us to continue to measure the abysmal distance that remains between one power and the other, for both Ivan and Dimitri are at the end still very far from having taken the path that would lead to triumph over the dire forms their destinies have taken. So, too, in the case of Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment*. The issue is finally settled tragically in the case of Stavrogin, who does not see any hope to come, in spite of the option of a life with Darya, and in the end hangs himself. That Dostoevski was at bottom working for Christ may not be doubted, but the kind of triumph over evil Dostoevski envisions for his Christ is for him, at least as an artist, still far from being a reality, if only because evil *would* tend to continue to conquer in human beings and in the most dire forms well beyond what we might care to imagine.

We have a way of understanding the deep problem involved through the remarkable account Dostoevski gives in one of his letters of the whole development of evil in modern times. He speaks of "representing" in his work "the seed of the idea of destruction in our time, in Russia, in the milieu of the young people who have lost touch with reality" (Dostoevski xx), and he focuses especially on

> *"denial not of God but of the meaning of His creation. The whole of socialism emerged and began with the denial of the meaning of historical reality and went on to a program of destruction and anarchism."* (Dostoevski xx)

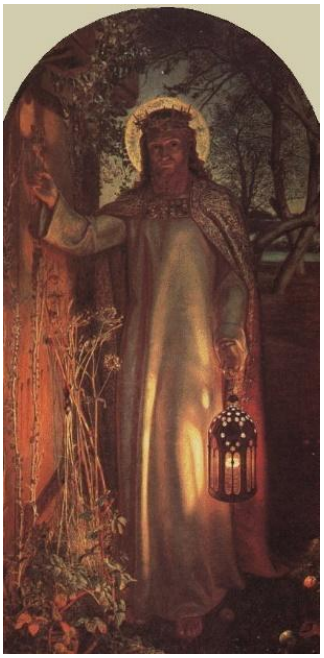
In another letter, Dostoevski notes that in fact

> *"the scientific and philosophical refutation of the existence of God has already been abandoned, present-day practical socialists are not occupied with it at all (as they were for the whole past century and the first half of the present one); instead they deny with all their might God's creation, God's world, and its meaning. Here in this alone does modern civilization find nonsense."* (Dostoevski x)

One sees in these terms the very structure of the novel under consideration here: the denial of God being most powerfully embodied by the character, Kirillov; the denial of God's creation by Stavrogin; the program of destruction and anarchism by Verkhovensky.

Dostoevski's editor makes the crucial point that "the whole 'development' is a continuous fall," one element leading logically into the next.[171] Basing himself strictly on what Dostoevski says here, this editor paints him as very simply opposed to this development, as if Dostoevski stood his ground, very simply, surely and squarely against a development of which he otherwise washes his hands clean. Over and against what Dostoevski's characters embody according to this editor (and here he quotes Bakhtin again) is that inviolable "authoritative image of the human being" represented by Christ (Dostoevski xviii-xix):

> *The openness of Dostoevsky's novels is an openness to this image; his polyphony has no other aim than the silent indication of its presence. Ideas that deface or distort this "authoritative image of a human being" in a person are indeed acting like demons, and are them.*



Christ the Light of the World
by William Hunt

One does not doubt that this "image," so powerfully spoken of here, does indeed represent the final standard against which we measure the hopeless actions of Dostoevski's characters in his novels. The question *remains*, nevertheless, as to how far Dostoevski has embodied this "image" in his presentations, and to what extent it may be said to triumph there, for there it may not appear to us to have triumphed very much at all—or at least we are only in the very modest beginnings of such a process.

To insist on the finality of this image when it comes to Dostoevski's position in his novels seems to me to anticipate and to overlook in the meantime just how engaged with the forces of evil Dostoevski's art is. This brings us back to the issue of whether Dostoevski went too far and how much can be taken on, which, as we saw, Tomberg raises in *Meditations*. (Here I am moving beyond the matter of "practical methods of evil" to consider how justified Dostoevski can be said to be in his dark art as a whole.) Can it be that we are still not ready to know, that humankind is still not ready to know, in what the dark influences of evil consist and where these may lead? Was Dostoevski ready to know? How did he himself manage with his investigations, which would seem not to have relented? Can Dostoevski be said

[171] One could see in this series early historical expressions of life-destroying sub-earthly forces such as we are becoming more and more conscious of in our time. In my *Riddle of the Sop*hia (in Chapters 4 and 5 of that book; see respectively n.21 and n.13 to these chapters), I have associated these forces with effects of "spiritual obduracy" (cf. the denial of God), "overpowering self-seeking whether in the ego or from the sexual drive" (cf. the denial of God's creation), and "dismembering power" (cf. nihilism and destruction).

to have been serving Christ by his art, or was he in fact merely opening the door to rebellion in giving expression to his ideas?

If we ask how far the denial of God can go, the answer can be found in Dostoevski's Kirillov; how far the denial of His Creation, Stavrogin; nihilism and destruction, Verkhovensky. Such positions have actually been made the basis of a philosophy of life, as in the case of Albert Camus, who made an ideal of the stances of both Kirillov and Stavrogin[172]. Jean-Paul Sartre (though not Camus) toyed very seriously with forms of revolutionary nihilism that, somewhere along the line, associate him with someone like Verkhovensky[173]. In this regard, Dostoevski's status as a modern artist (as distinct from the Christian man) is highlighted the more, such being the appeal and by virtue of this appeal (to the young especially) the frightful challenge of these ideas. These ideas Dostoevski himself struggled with in his youth, by his own confession, and it would appear he continued to struggle with them, though by the time he was writing his novel he was clearly now distanced from them. It is clear that he resisted them; Camus and Sartre did not: would that not make Dostoevski's investigations of these ideas therefore, paradoxically, something to be championed, inasmuch as they show how resistance can be achieved where these ideas have gotten the upper hand, as they have in many of our own contemporaries? However, the question remains how far we can go in seeking to understand without our succumbing by our knowledge to the very influences we seek to combat, because these will have taken up our energy, and perhaps even taken away our vision and deprived us of our counter-active creative élan (as Tomberg puts it above)? One speaks of resistance to these ideas in Dostoevski, but it is, in fact, not so clear that he has managed, as an artist, the full form of resistance to them that he ideally seeks, and that he is not still very much struggling to see his way through—to the path that can lead one back out of them.

The revolting case of Verkhovensky we have already considered, and, to do justice to Dostoevski's treatment, one should note just how fully and exhaustively Verkhovensky is given to us in all of his peculiarities of thought and expression, at once so acutely antagonizing and officious. One would think that Verkhovensky would be a sufficient discouragement in himself, and that someone like Sartre who flirted with a revolutionary nihilism open to violence would have seen in him quite enough to divert him from association with the likes of him. Kirillov is

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[172] See *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Tr. Justin O'Brien (New York: Vintage, 1955, pp.108-109): "Stavrogin and Ivan Karamazov try out the absurd truths in practical life. They are the ones liberated by Kirillov's death."

[173] This is at least logically true inasmuch as Sartre was at some point ready, in the fight against Western colonialism, to countenance the symbolic value of the Soviet Union as a world leader in communism—as late as the 1940s and 1950s. In doing so, Sartre was condoning the egregiously inhuman practices in that country that had been perpetrated by souls that one does not doubt shared in the spirit and attitudes of someone like Verkhovensky.

not nearly so simple a case. His is a classic expression of the basis for denying God and of the further intentions that follow from this position. From a certain point of view, he satisfies Camus' own model of the philosophic man who in fully affirming death (as one of the two main facts that continually absorb the truly philosophic man) does not for all that affirm life any the less (see Dostoevski 236). Kirillov chooses suicide while Camus rejects it, but it is a rather different form of suicide than the one Camus singles out. Camus considers that form of suicide which is undertaken in despair of living. Kirillov is not in despair. He would make his suicide into the perfect emblem of a new age which must learn how to banish the fear of death that is otherwise still generally associated with the fear of God. As there is no God, there can be no fear of going to meet Him in death; there can, therefore, be no fear of death. Death is in this way overcome, all anxiety about it removed. Likewise must the anxiety of ceasing to live be removed, for it must be a matter of the perfect balance of consciousness in man of life and inevitable death: the power of Kirillov's death will lie in being a perfect emblem of all this.

Consequently Kirillov will do everything to keep himself in a state of perfect balance along these lines when he finally does proceed to his suicide. There will in this way be proof of the state in which man must now keep himself, freed of the burden of the idea of God. Such a state is what Camus endorses, seeing in Kirillov's action the achievement on which Dostoevski's Stavrogin (and even Ivan) could and should have been building (they fail themselves at the last, according to Camus). The scene of Kirillov's suicide is profoundly haunting and profoundly ambiguous; it is as if Kirillov were still alive and staring out at us though dead, as if he were *not* in fact dead. The scene has been described as "the most terrible single episode in Dostoevsky"[174], and one can see why. But what is the value of Dostoevski's having bestowed such attention in his art on such an action? What can have been his experience in managing this effect? Among other things, he had offered Camus precisely the support *he* wanted and needed to articulate his own absurd philosophy. This does not appear to be anything Dostoevski could have wished, but had he in the meantime taken things too far in seeking to understand and to cope? Or was this a legitimate form of engagement, with what *we* take to be a demonic tendency in human nature and ironically in fact proof *against* Camus (in the effect of ghoulishness)?[175] Had Dostoevski, in

[174] Colin Wilson, *The Outsider*. New York: Diversion Books, 1956, unpaginated.

[175] Somewhat related to the effect Dostoevski achieves in this respect is Tomberg's Letter on Death (the XIII$^{th}$ Arcanum) in which he addresses the materialistic hope that it would be possible to create a form of immortality in *this* world on the basis of a process of "crystallisation" ("by means of the crystallisation of a new body within the physical body which can resist death and survive the destruction of the physical body"—*Meditations* 356). One can thereby constitute oneself as a ghost, or ghoul: "A ghost is always constituted as a consequence of crystallisation: i.e., crystallisation of a desire, a passion, or a purpose of great intensity" (360), and what "*happens* with human beings who are possessed by strong desires, passions and intentions can be achieved *methodically*." Tomberg cites in this respect the teachings of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky (355-360).

the meantime, gained for himself some form of freedom from and power over the sort of justification of his philosophy Kirillov pretends to? How free had Dostoevski remained from the dire depths of his representation? And how shall we say have we, as readers of Dostoevski's action, come to terms with such an appalling spectacle?

The case of Stavrogin, though less immediately spectacular, poses no less challenging an issue. This is because of his more obvious general appeal, caught up as he is in a highly elaborate (representatively complete) process of self-searching. He is the modern hero *par excellence*, except that he is also an aristocrat. Camus revived him when in 1959 (over eighty-five years later) he adapted Dostoevski's novel for the stage (among other things, Camus' purpose in putting his play on was to expose the pretensions of Sartre and his associates to a form of revolutionary nihilism that was ready to countenance violence). By the time we encounter him in the novel, Stavrogin has considered almost every option of life, and in doing so has put himself in a deep relationship with almost every major character in the novel.[176] His personal influence on these characters clearly is great, and he has that influence in large measure as the soul of Russian nobility. Everyone would turn to him for direction.

He begins as a supporter of the revolutionary cause but in a rather extraordinary association with the Russian God (the "God of the Motherland"—Dostoevski 248). This is the high (and impossible) conjunction of opposites from which we descend in this novel; it is the ideal that originally attracts Shatov (Darya's brother) to Stavrogin. Through the cause, Stavrogin links himself along the way also with Kirillov (who is significantly linked to Shatov, though opposites, when they room up in America), with Lebyadkin (Marya's brother), as well as with Verkhovensky. At each juncture Stavrogin is in an utterly different state of mind, while it is not at all clear that he *remains* connected to the cause though everyone assumes he is or could still be. At some point Stavrogin falls into a form of doubt, and it has the effect of a denial of God; at least that is how it comes across to Kirillov who is won over by Stavrogin at that point (Stavrogin later openly declares himself an atheist—Dostoevski 248). Strangely enough, we learn that Stavrogin held the two views—with Shatov, on the one hand, association with God, and with Kirillov on the other, denial of God—in one and the same short period of time ("That all this happened at one and the same time is almost correct"—248) but that he pronounced both of these views in all sincerity ("I was not deceiving either one of you"). It is as if Stavrogin felt it was as easy for one position to be entertained as for the other, both being relative to what the human mind could make of the situation.

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[176] So Shatov who speaks of "'your having meant so much in my life'" (Dostoevski 240); "'I cannot tear you out of my heart, Nikolai Stavrogin'" (255); so Lebyadkin: "'you meant so much in my fate!'" (263), not to mention Verkhovensky: "'Stavrogin, you are beautiful! … Do you know that you are beautiful!'" (419).

In the next and most crucial phase, Stavrogin, for lack of anything to believe in, gives himself up to a life of dark sensuality, the phase in which he becomes linked to the wasteful carouser Lebyadkin and, it would seem, along the line, Verkhovensky. Stavrogin pursues this life in a somewhat Nietzschean spirit of experimentation: he would test the limits of life's experiences, and he comes to his disturbing conclusions about sensuality that we have seen above.[177] Having learned of this life, Shatov is dumbfounded:

Stavrogin, from the 2014 Russian film

> *"Is it true that you insisted you knew no difference in beauty between some brutal sensual stunt and any great deed, even the sacrifice of life for mankind? Is it true that you found a coincidence of beauty, a sameness of pleasure at both poles?"* (Dostoevski 254)[178]

It is a phase of life from which Stavrogin will never recover. The marriage to Marya will be an attempt to come out of it, but this too will turn out to be but another expression of the same; romantic love with Liza also will offer no way out, likewise, the deep affectionate loyalty of Darya.

It is in this life of dark sensuality that the limits of God's Creation are denied, and the fascination with such sensuality continues.[179] For Camus, such fascination is proof of a reality in the life of the soul that cannot be denied, and for him justifies despair. The world involving us inalienably in such despair, humankind has only what noble spirit it is left with in reserve to fall back on. It is the case with Stavrogin whose own reserves of spirit for supporting such a reality cannot be denied: "'I've tested my strength everywhere. This testing proved it to be boundless … But what to apply my strength to—that I have never seen, nor do I see it now'" (Dostoevski

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[177] Such experimentation being, for Tomberg, the outcome of doubt, and the way of self-abandonment: "to seek experiences or to make experiments based on doubt is the very essence of carnal, psychic and spiritual unchastity" (*Meditations* 133). Behind this direction, according to Tomberg, lies "the superman" or "anti-christ," i.e., humankind's own demonic creation, who, pre-eminently, drove Nietzsche: "he [the anti-christ] invited him to cast himself down into the domain which is beyond good and evil" (140).

[178] "'Is it true that you lured and corrupted children? Speak do not dare to lie'," to which Stavrogin responds: "'I did speak those words, but it was not I who offended children,' said Stavrogin, but only after too long a silence. He turned pale, and his eyes lit up." (Dostoevski 254) This turns out to be in fact a lie (he confesses to his offense in his interview with Tikhon—see 696ff, in that chapter of the novel that was left out).

[179] "'I do not loathe the memory … Perhaps this remembrance even now contains something pleasurable for my passions.'" (704); also: "'I am as capable now as ever before of wishing to do a good deed, and I take pleasure in that; along with it, I wish for evil and also take pleasure [in that]'" (675).

675). Up to this point, Stavrogin is Camus' absurd hero, especially in that psychological area where Stavrogin has begun to resist sensuality, as he seems to have at the time we meet him. For Dostoevski, however, Stavrogin *remains* a disturbing challenge; that his inclination to sensuality cannot be finally overcome continues to dismay our author. And here is where the value of Dostoevski's art, which would resolve this situation if it could, finds its justification. His art stands over and against such a modern appropriation of the situation as Camus' philosophy would accomplish, serving, in fact, to counter it: in its own strictest terms, Dostoevski's art would and should be able to wean adherents of a modern absurd philosophy away from its spurious appeal. Stavrogin puts an end to his life, an action that Camus could never countenance in the terms of *his* absurdist formulation. And why does Stavrogin do so? From shame, as he says himself in his letter to Darya at the novel's close[180]. Such shame is the prelude to faith and potentially the way back to it, even if here it is darkly assumed, even if Stavrogin himself cannot see his way there, for *he* has been finally marked by his life. Through Stavrogin's terrible end, Dostoevski has declared at least on the unsustainability, the final unlivability, of a modern absurd existence such as Camus would wring out of the battle between the two powers of which we have heard above—possession and enlightenment, which Camus reduces to a question of despair and reserves of strength. In this shifty area, Dostoevski's difficult and courageous enterprise offers a path through for many who know themselves unhappily caught up in the modern absurd view, such the hope that Dostoevski continues to offer through all the struggles of his dark art.[181]

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[180] "'I confirm that in my conscience I am guilty of my wife's death … I am also guilty before Lizaveta'" (Dostoevski 674). And to Tikhon: "'Is this what is called remorse of conscience or repentance?'" (704).

[181] There is another level on which Dostoevski's presentation challenges Camus' philosophy. This is in showing how the life Stavrogin has known must lead also to indifference about the nihilism that he sees taking shape around him (in the end he allows everything to happen without intervening, even when he knows that Marya's life and that of Shatov are threatened—for it seems to him in the end to be all the same). The denial of God leads inevitably to denial of His Creation and at last to a nihilistic re-creation of the world along man's own lines: acceptance or at least indifference to this. Camus rejected this last position (i.e., nihilism) but along this series one is naturally led to it (see p.156: "[t]he whole development is a continuous fall"). Sartre himself was led to it quite logically, which made Camus' famously insistent opposition to him on this score ironically futile. The quarrel between Camus and Sartre over this (in which Camus got the worst of it) comes across in this respect as a quarrel between two souls that have wandered. It was the occasion of a still greater "fall," beyond the one we have been plotting, that Camus would later dramatize in his novel by that name. In the end, in his flight from God, man would only seem to be able to progressively undo himself—for more on this subject see my essay "The Fall by Camus" (at johnomeara.squarespace.com/Archives).

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# *The Power of Nothing: The Limits of Non-Participation in Act 1 Scene 1 of "King Lear"*

John O'Meara

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## *(i)*
## *The Main Problem for Criticism and the Main Point of this Scene*

Among the kinds of action in Shakespeare's plays that have consistently baffled literary criticism, the disastrous exchange between Cordelia and Lear in the opening scene of *King Lear* must be counted as the most peculiar case. Before this action, criticism has either been given up to a strange form of critical paralysis or given in to a hard, overriding spasm: critical paralysis in the case of critics who say too little on the side of a negative view of Cordelia, a hard spasm in the case of critics who have claimed too much on the side of a positive view.

In the former case, we have had comments that one feels would be more appropriate to a testy exchange at breakfast table, as that Cordelia is guilty of "a startling rudeness" (Farley-Hills 185), is subject to an unfortunate condition of "nerves" (Brooke 20), or betrayed by "a little faulty admixture of pride and sullenness" (Coleridge 335). In the latter case, there has been no limit placed on championing Cordelia as the "free spirit" (Sun 2) who would love beyond the confining political terms of such a ceremony as Lear has devised: "in 'Nothing' the play shows Cordelia's love for Lear as precisely a love for him as *whatever*" (22). Cordelia would in the meantime introduce a personal "dialogue" with Lear in the very midst of this scene's highly charged ritualistic moment: even though her response to Lear's invitation to speak in this moment is "Nothing", she has been seen as making an approach to Lear that is profoundly "interlocutive" by way of a "metacommunicational discourse" (Dodd 496-498). Seeking in the circumstances a "proper discussion" with Lear, Cordelia speaks her 'Nothing' in fact in a "jestful" tone that would invite Lear to step away from his laughable seriousness in this moment (Fraser 8). Beyond this, it is when Lear "is himself reduced to nothing", many scenes later, that he comes to see that "Cordelia's 'nothing' was the fullest, the most meaningful response of all the daughters … a place where things of a deep nature come to be known"—Cordelia's

[182] The present essay forms part of a series to be found on the page entitled "More on Shakespeare *et al*.".

'Nothing' having by then become "something", having "come to ripeness" (Haas xi). As if Shakespeare intended both Cordelia and Lear to be the pioneering champions of modern freedom and of modern nothingness by plunging them into an abysmal suffering not finally comparable to any other in the rest of the world's literature! I will return to these contradictory, wishful views along the way…

In the following pages I shall be expounding in greater depth on a view of this scene's action that I have already presented elsewhere: I do so by way of filling out the reading that underpins my controversial view of this scene.[183] In the last analysis it is a matter of overcoming an unspoken critical prejudice, about Cordelia—a prejudice that is unique in the history of Shakespeare criticism. Unlike in the case of any other Shakespeare character, it would appear that one cannot permit oneself to say anything too negative about Cordelia; otherwise one can only claim everything positive about her. She is treated virtually as untouchable, and I believe this is the reason why the scene has elicited such unsatisfying accounts among our critics. The power of this reigning taboo is perhaps most insidiously expressed in the extraordinary claim that Cordelia's asides in this scene in fact "make Cordelia the hypocrite" (Rutter 184,185), force her, that is, to be a hypocrite—surely an amazingly strained reading of her position, but one proclaimed to show up (by a deep form of excavation) the extent of the hold the paternalistic culture of Shakespeare's day maintained over everyone. In being caricatured as at once the stereotype of "virtuous silence" and of "devious femininity" (the contradiction being accommodated by some form of "paradox"), Cordelia is not presented as a "monster" like her sisters but is herself thus "monstered"—to begin with. Contrast with this emphasis on Cordelia's enforced hypocrisy the view that sees her as a champion of the free spirit who is only too ready to laugh her way openly into a discussion of final state affairs with Lear. It is indeed as if, on account of a reigning taboo, one had not been free to speak about this scene within the limits of the way it actually unfolds but was, rather, forced to embrace even the weirdest paradigms of what constitutes proper behavior on a formal social-political occasion that is intended to be Lear's last act as reigning King. In every sphere of commentary on this scene, in fact, the main point about Cordelia's pretensions, pretensions forced upon her by her social disability at a certain level of performance, has been missed: namely, that there is an absolute limit to non-participation in a formal setting of such far-reaching political implications, and that 'nothing', as an actual condition of existence, reserves a power that no one can pretend to revert to, let alone champion, or brave, not only in such a context as this play presents but perhaps in any context—as we see from the awful event it unleashes that is beyond the control

[183] See the chapter "On *King Lear*" from my *Shakespeare, the Goddess, and Modernity*. Bloomington, IN: iUniverse Inc., 2012.

of everyone. In the meantime, unable to see how seriously responsible Cordelia is for things going wrong in the opening scene, critics have stood on their heads to work out all the ways in which it is Lear who must therefore be held to be responsible, finding dark monsters in almost everything he is about, long before the crisis fully unfolds which he indeed helps to substantiate and to perpetuate…

*(ii)*

*An Egalitarian Motive in Dividing the Kingdom*

One stumbling block to our experience of this scene has been ably and summarily disposed of and can be thrust aside at once. As for Lear's decision to divide the kingdom and to resign from the throne, it is surely decisive that

> *there is no evidence in the play of any surprise on the part of the court or of Lear's daughters, and even Kent and Gloucester, familiar with the king's decision to divide the realm prior to the court scene (I.i.1-4), raise no objection or express any anxiety in their private conversation that opens the play … [N]either Lear's decision to retire* ***nor the ceremonious and formal way in which he distributes power*** *appear to surprise anybody … [T]he scheme …* [is] *perceived as politically sound and uncontroversial.*[184]

In fact, a great deal that is positive can be said of the way Lear disposes of his kingdom in this extraordinary moment, and *especially* from our modern standpoint: perhaps above all, the *egalitarian* motive that emphatically propels Lear's division of the kingdom. The play itself opens on the theme of "equalities": as in the case of the minutely considered provisions made for Albany and Cornwall, "equalities are so weighed that curiosity in neither can make choice of each other's moiety".[185] At the same time it is clear from what Kent and Gloucester are considering that Lear knows the difference between one man and the other: Kent and Gloucester find it surprising that, in spite of what he knows, Lear has treated the two men

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[184] Piotr Sadowski, *Dynamism of Character in Shakespeare's Mature Tragedies* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003), pp.221-229. Highlighting mine. Sadowksi concludes as follows: "Far from being 'absurd' Lear's initial intentions and arrangements regarding his retirement and the division of the kingdom appear logical, legal, and practical, and given his static character also psychologically inevitable" (223). Quite impressively, Sadowski bases his view of Lear's fundamental character (and indeed those of all of Shakespeare's dramatis personae in the mature tragedies) on an elaborate Systems theory of character which it would take us too far afield to enter into here. In the meantime it will strike us as remarkable, and Sadowski himself notes as much, that the view of Lear's abdication as 'absurd' should have taken hold of "generations of critics" (221) who have been unanimous on this score—an indication of the depth of prejudice Lear's actions themselves have occasioned on the other side of a critical issue that also concerns Cordelia.

[185] https://www.folgerdigitaltexts.org/html/Lr.html. All references to this text unless otherwise indicated.

equally: (Kent) "I thought the King had more affected the Duke of Albany than Cornwall"; (Gloucester) "It did always seem so to us."[186] Clearly Shakespeare knew where he was going with his action. Lear, it turns out, is right about the difference between the two men, and perhaps what Shakespeare was saying is that it may not be possible in the end to ignore the difference between a good nature and an evil nature in seeking to make equals of men. But that may be only because things go wrong first on another basis. The egalitarian scheme could always have worked out. Meantime, Lear proceeds to expound on what he calls his "darker purpose". This cannot be a reference to his division of the kingdom, which has already been more than fully advertised in the form of the detailed apportionment of land showing on the map that lies on the floor before everyone. Lear's "darker purpose" refers us rather to the riddle that underlies this event, which no one, not even the audience (on first viewing), is in any position to guess at.

### *(iii)*

### *Lear's Exclusive Purpose and Goal: A Life with Cordelia*

We understand what this amounts to only after the debacle: Lear anticipates that, beyond dividing the kingdom equally among his daughters, he will be making the further gesture of bestowing *himself* on the daughter he loves best and who loves him best ("I thought to set my rest on her kind nursery"). Moreover, from his place in Cordelia's section of the kingdom, Lear would surely "retain the name and all the addition of a king", i.e., the expectation of due respect from everyone as the King he has always been in his person and would naturally remain. There is a point to fully understanding what Lear's intentions are in this respect, even if we only grasp the matter subsequently, because they are what underlie the full confidence he clearly brings to the event of his formal renunciation of power. He would hardly have ventured on his "darker purpose" in the plain sight of everyone and in such once-in-a-lifetime formal circumstances if he had doubted for a moment that Cordelia was capable of encountering the event with what expressive ability she does have. Lear simply assumes that the greater love between them, which is already fully noted by all, will quite naturally shine through her words as the most meaningful response to his riddle. This is the sense to his ambiguous, though not entirely unguessable, riddle as for "where nature doth with *merit* challenge" (it might *almost* have been guessed at by those in the court who had kept Lear's obviously greater fondness for Cordelia in sight—a

[186] There would seem, as if in compensation, to be an effort on Lear's part to deliberately humor Cornwall perhaps just because the difference between the men is known to him. Although Cornwall is married to Lear's second daughter, Lear in his formal address before the court consistently refers to him first (see I.i.44-45 and 142). Even the stage directions (in the Folio) reflect this tendency, Cornwall preceding Albany on their entrance in the first scene.

fondness already well-known, also to his other daughters: "he always loved our sister most"). Lear's intention, after a lifetime of ruling, is to spend the rest of his days in the company of his best-loved Cordelia, given over to the one thing that matters for him at this stage, which is the love between them. In the very short time that remains to him (he is after all over 80!) he would at last free himself for what truly matters, especially as he is on the verge of death (Freud duly noted of this scene that here Lear was "making friends with the necessity of dying"). Lear's final "purpose" is thus to announce, by way of a celebration of the love between himself and Cordelia, that he will be spending the rest of his days with her, having in the meantime more than generously bestowed his property, and the power and rule that go with this, upon his daughters equally.[187] Lear would in the meantime obviate any controversy or dispute (any "strife") over the portions of property and power to which his daughters would feel they have a right. His so-called "abdication" is thus, at every level, a complete and thoroughly thought-out gesture of great generosity motivated by a firm desire to ensure every possible good for the future of his daughters, the kingdom, and himself. Could Lear have done any better? It is after duly settling matters, after his anticipation of a lasting peace among all concerned, that one imagines—had the event turned out well—Lear coming down from his throne at the climactic moment of this celebration, after Cordelia has spoken, and giving himself away to her. He will *at the same time be keeping his crown*, as no doubt he would be free to do in his continued affirmation of a symbolic identity that he could expect everyone to honour and respect—his later gesture, *after* the debacle, of partitioning his crown between Albany and Cornwall constituting, contrastingly, the frighteningly hopeless act of one who, as we shall see, *by then* no longer feels he has anything to live for.

### *(iv)*
### *A Complete Confidence:*
### *Acceptance and Participation of the Court*

The King we see presiding over the event of his formal "abdication" is a man of total confidence exercising his last right, as a King in power, to stand incontestably by his "intent" and his "will", which, in this final act of power, are for nothing other than the greater good of all concerned. Lear's confidence in this moment is explained by the utter completeness of his vision in this respect: for his daughters, for the kingdom, and for himself. In spite of what his older daughters will shortly have to say about him, who are by then wilfully in league against their father, there is no indication right through the ritual event—not, that is, until Cordelia is

[187] This would seem to make Lear himself capable of a love for Cordelia as *whatever* (see Sun 2, above).

called upon—of any dissatisfaction with Lear; the record would seem to be of a King who has ruled the kingdom with much competence: "honored" as "king" by Kent (who would know something of what it is right to think and to do), "loved" as his "father", "followed" as his "master", as his "great patron thought on" in his prayers.[188] The attitude brought to the event by everyone, again until Cordelia is called on, is one of unambiguous acceptance (as the opening exchange between Kent and Gloucester conveys); all are in readiness to participate. Lear's confidence, what's more, drives the event forward with much energy; the rhythm of his address to the court is from the first fast-moving and powerful. Filled with an utter confidence of his purpose, Lear has the end already in view. He is not, in fact, greatly concerned with what will be said by his daughters along the way, only that this ritual event shall unfold efficiently to its preconcluded goal. His purpose does not lie in sitting back to indulge himself in unctuous phrases coined by his daughters in flattery of himself (as so many commentators have wilfully claimed). What use does he have for these phrases especially at this stage of his life and given his present purpose? He simply expects the ritual to play itself out according to the most natural expectations of how his daughters will express themselves, and any straightforward response to his question from his daughters, even a banal one, will do, even from Cordelia—for, as I have suggested, as the rhythm of his address conveys, he has already projected himself into the end-point of the ritual.[189]

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[188] Farley-Hills (186) captures this action's key-note where he speaks of "[t]he sense of Lear's greatness, his extraordinary vigor in his old age …, the impression given that he has been a king for many years and is in absolute control of his kingdom, that he is (as Kent tells him…) the image of authority, his deep sense of political responsibility in arranging for the succession 'that future strife/May be prevented now' …[,] the [very] generous willingness to relinquish power to ensure a satisfactory succession … Perhaps it is not so surprising in an age when kings have been either outlawed or emasculated and the authority of fathers questioned, that Shakespeare's presentation of his great King has been so misunderstood."

[189] Here I am happy to quote Nicholas Grene from *Shakespeare's Tragic Imagination*, London: Macmillan, 1992, p.152: "no contingencies of plot weaken the dramatic sovereignty of the scene or impede the inexorability with which it runs its course. It seems inappropriate to interrogate Lear's motives at the level of individual character, either to detect a hidden political design, or psychological weaknesses—a reprehensible craving for flattery, the desire to control even in appearing to relinquish control … [I]f the division of the kingdom is pre-drawn, what is there to compete for? … [T]his is a children's party with prizes for everyone; all that is required is that they join in the game which is, of course, what Cordelia refuses to do".

The reader will note that in the case of Sadowski, Farley-Hills, and Grene, I quote what are, in the critical literature, exceptional takes on the impact King Lear makes in this scene.

## *(v)*

## *Ironies*

## *Misapplied by Criticism*

There is no doubt that Shakespeare has in the meantime interwoven his presentation with a number of ominous hints of the action he knows he will be developing. Lear's reference to a "darker purpose" is a case in point with its obvious allusion to the dark world of universal breakdown that we will soon be entering. Lear's use of "divest" where he speaks of "divesting" himself of rule belongs to the same category of allusion, for later Lear will indeed be stripped down to almost nothing, deprived of all civilized accoutrements. However, such intimations of the disaster to come, which Shakespeare has clearly deliberately built into his text, only serve to contrast sharply with the present moment, which is one of pure celebratory joy because of Lear's focus on the goal of the opening scene's ritual. The contrast highlights just how deeply treacherous developing events can be and how unwittingly human beings will contribute to them, even while they think they are standing by noteworthy principles. To reason thus is, in any case, to give oneself to a textual analysis that is only grasped later in the study and will certainly not be consciously in the range of one who is viewing the play for the first time. (Shakespeare's attention to this textual level, on the other hand, does indicate that he might expect a viewer in subsequent viewings to pick up on the textual outride, besides intending his play *as* literature to be studied, with an eye clearly to posterity.)

### *a) 'Darker Purpose': Lear Is Not Compelling Love*

We have already disposed of the idea that "darker purpose" relates to Lear's division of the kingdom. To see in "darker purpose", alternatively, the suggestion that what underlies Lear's action in the opening scene, in spite of his formal abdication, is some deeper sinister desire for power, by compelling submission from his daughters in respect of love, is yet another idea that needs to be cast aside. It is not, as many critics have argued, Lear's concern to secure some form of oath from his daughters that would bind them by their speech to a love-allegiance towards him in the future.[190] There is nothing whatever in the play to suggest that their speeches about love will bind Lear's daughters to him. His question, as we will see more fully in a moment, "Who shall we say doth love us *most*?", in contrast with the very legal act of conferring lands and power, is simply a tantalizing riddle which will have served to impress when, as he expects, he will fulfill it by giving himself grandly in the end to Cordelia. That Lear's question is implicitly connected through the word "most" with Lear's end-goal is textually reinforced

[190] More on the theme of obedience below.

where Lear explains himself later: "I loved her *most* and thought to set my rest/On her kind nursery" (the point is reinforced again at the end of this scene where Goneril and Regan themselves allude to this love: "he always loved our sister *most*.") Lear is not *compelling* love in this scene, as if he needed that given where his heart lies quite fully, nor is he wrong in thinking that it lies there quite properly.

That he should, in the meantime, expect love or at least respect if not reverence from his other daughters as their father, also in part because of his amazing generosity towards them here, will seem to many wholly understandable and natural. Lear ought to inspire reverence quite naturally, for he represents royalty in the most essential sense, not only by virtue of his long experience but also in his very person. Kent's words, later, that Lear has in him what Kent would call "authority" cut through the circumstantial irony of Lear's ill-fated dependence by then on his older daughters, to bring home this inexpungeable fact.[191] At the start of this play, and one might easily argue throughout in spite of the hopeless irony—for Lear cannot help being himself in this regard—Lear is "every inch a King" and indeed "Royal Lear" as he is addressed by Kent at the height of the initial debacle.[192] Nor are Goneril and Regan themselves the pure monsters that criticism has made of them, certainly not here. There is still a significant measure in them of a familial bonding with Lear that is of long date, and they are very clearly his daughters and he their father, whatever else there is that will greatly oppose father and daughters in the future. There are some telling scenes in the television version of *King Lear* that features Olivier as Lear in which these daughters are seen to be deeply affected by Lear's outrage against them, to the point of tears in the case of Goneril; Regan's more superficial nature does not betray more than a wincing discomfort in her reaction, pointing, nevertheless, to some sense of conscience in her somewhere in her nature in spite of her more obvious indulgence in the cruel impulses that will hound Gloucester later (in comparison with Goneril's more deeply grounded, evolved, and studied violence).

### *b) Countering 'Future Strife' through a Fine Distribution of Power*

This play's opening scene is, otherwise, emphatically *about* Lear's *renunciation* of power—as we have seen, towards the higher end of a life of love. Lear will have secured this life of love by bestowing his lands and power equally upon his daughters so that all will be satisfied. Only on this basis, in fact, can Lear be left free to fully value, as he sees fit, the life of

[191] Cf. n.7.

[192] See Nicholas Brooke (20): "[H]e is here (what he calls himself later when the truth has gone) 'every inch a King', who justifies Kent's address". I beg to differ that the truth ever goes.

love that is left him.[193] In this respect himself can only do so much: should discord arise between his elder daughters (the discord he has done everything to dispel), that will be a measure of what *they* are; over this he cannot have any further control. Lear will in the meantime have reserved some power over any such developments by his association with Cordelia's own forces; he has not abandoned his political sense so much that he has not assured himself some measure of defense and safety: Cordelia's further association by marriage with French forces will in the meantime have created another form of the balance of power that would surely in normal circumstances act as an effective deterrent against any thought of invasion of Cordelia's part of the kingdom by Lear's other daughters. However, neither does Lear nor do we anticipate such an event happening in the context of this action, just because the distribution of power has been conducted with an utmost fairness and all parties are to be satisfied. Meanwhile the suggestion of a direction towards a more open, free-minded union between nations one would think would, especially today, have its ready champions, and it is just the direction Lear would allow to unfold from his strangely progressive idea of political association based as this is in fundamentally egalitarian principles. Lear is admittedly himself only more or less consciously bringing in such a world by disposing of the kingdom in the way he has, but here is a modern ideal appearing well before its time. And yet nowhere in the criticism of this play has this egalitarian impulse in Lear been recognized—this from a general prejudice against Lear that has been built into the response of critics who have anachronistically imposed later developments in the kingdom of this play (the future strife that actually emerges), which have their *own* explanations, upon the carefully thought-out conditions under which this kingdom is originally designed to continue.

### *c) Peaceful Accommodation and a Humorous Setting at Ease: 'Crawling'*

"Equalities", as we have seen, is the prominent theme struck in the very opening of this play. Critics have, in the meantime, only rightly brought out the quite intentional ironies that surround this theme, when the play is seen from a privileged, textual point of view. Can equalities be finally created when one is dealing with such morally opposed natures as Albany and Cornwall, Edgar and Edmund? though we only come to see things that way after they have gone disastrously wrong. Kent himself is ready to allow that Edmund, the product of an adulterous liaison, may be properly admitted to his company, even to his "love". In the longer view this will strike us as a totally unreal disposition, but in its immediate context it has the

[193] For a peculiarly zealous critique of this position (somewhat in the assumed spirit of Cordelia), see Sun 21: "[Cordelia] does not give [Lear] the speech he demands, which is the promise that she will play her part in securing the political realm for his freedom".

effect of civilized accommodation, whatever failures Gloucester's acts have exposed in him. Can Lear be wrong, as for Cornwall? How else is one to hope for reconciliation and peace, if not through such accommodation and an orientation towards good? There is also the irony of the "future strife" Lear would proactively and wishfully avert. However, it is noteworthy that such strife, between Cornwall and Albany, later emerges not from an impulse by one to subvert the other's power or to seize the other's lands but from a radical confrontation of Cornwall by Albany over the former's inhumane dispossession of Lear (even though Cornwall's treatment is otherwise, from a certain perspective, reasonably based on the view that in this case "he (Lear) leads himself"). Goneril and Regan, for their part, will fight each other brutally over Edmund, and not over each other's kingdoms.[194] The fallout for all concerned has nothing to do in the end with Lear's division of the kingdom as such but derives rather from a series of other developments that have their own causes and points of origin.

Finally, the opening action's last major irony worked into the play's text—where Lear alludes to his "crawling" towards death: he will disburden himself of rule, he implies, because given his age, he will soon be reduced to impotence and crippling disability. Projecting oneself especially to the ending of this play, where we watch Lear literally reduced to the most miserable crawling, even grovelling (as he lies on the floor hung over the dead Cordelia), how can anyone even begin to hold the extreme irony of his remark against Lear, let alone argue a case on the basis of this word for his infantilism in this scene (as, for example, Fraser—3)? Spoken out of the total confidence he is experiencing in this moment, Lear's self-deprecating remark is intended *humorously*, to deflect immediately from the grandeur of the event and to humanize proceedings: the tone of the event shifts almost at once away from the high-minded concerns of Lear's initial address to accommodate the presence of the participants in this event and to put them at ease. What an extreme irony Shakespeare allows himself with this detail, in the meantime, in a larger view: it exposes just how hopelessly innocent and unsuspecting human beings can be with respect to any horrible fate that may await them, how hopelessly innocent even a King can be, and especially one, perhaps, who pretends to allow himself some final time in which he can apply himself to love and come on these terms, to a lasting account with life! However, we *do not* have the larger view at the beginning of this play, and Lear's remark functions at this point quite simply or not so simply as a form of social humour intended to set the participants in this event at ease from the beginning—a gesture, in fact, of real social ability.

[194] Cornwall is, of course, additionally called to account by Albany for his horrible violence against Gloucester and for the political liberties he and Regan allow themselves in declaring as treason any acts aiming to support the King. Nevertheless, what I say in the next sentence remains true.

*d) The Marvellous Terms of Lear's Riddle: 'Most', 'Bounty', 'Merit'*

As the play presents itself in this first scene, we are indeed very far from the play's very horrible ironies. In fact, these can only be grasped properly on the basis of a privileged textual view of the action, and can directors or readers thus really be explicitly bringing out, let alone stressing, these ironies as the opening scene actually unfolds? These ironies are ensconced in Shakespeare's text only for those who will have been initiated to the whole play, and who then can indeed return to this scene with an appalled sense of the horrible *distance* Shakespeare is insisting on between innocence and experience, even for those who pretend to know the world of experience (this is how directors also should be bringing their privileged knowledge back into the play). For the opening scene takes us through effects that, in fact, predispose everyone to the event that is about to unfold (the audience included): effects of accommodation, acceptance, participation, remarkable fairness and generosity, great majesty, confidence and rhythmic movement, social charm, and sheer wonder—in this last case catering to how an audience *will* wonder at such developments, so like in fairy-tales, as those that condition the tantalizing riddle that Lear puts to his daughters: "Who shall we say doth love us most?" We have seen what Lear's intention with this riddle actually is, and he frames his end-goal, which is itself marvellous, inevitably in marvellous terms. His "largest bounty" is at stake, where "bounty" quite intentionally suggests richness, the very richness of "love" that Lear shares with Cordelia (who, in her aside, acknowledges the richness of that love herself, although she is by then already biased against the proceedings: "I am sure my love's more richer than my tongue"[195]).

The further terms in which Lear frames his riddle, "That we our largest bounty may extend/Where nature doth with *merit* challenge," conforming with the fact that the outcome is already predetermined for him, serve merely to mask the ritual and to make it believable. Lear's "largest bounty" is not really going to be decided by "merit," since the winner by "merit" has already been decided. As for the riddle's other condition conveyed through the terms "Since now we will divest us … Who shall we say doth love us most?": there is nothing to suggest that what Lear is saying is that he is asking his daughters to prove themselves worthy of their share of the kingdom by demonstrating their love to him, that only by their show of love at this event

[195] Brian Vickers makes a convincing/conclusive case for insisting on the Quarto's "richer" rather than the Folio's "ponderous": "a polysyllabic Latinate word is hardly appropriate to Cordelia's plain-spokenness especially in the context of one- or two-syllable words." Vickers offers an explanation for the later variant: "The modernizing Folio editor, I suggest, introduced the phrase 'more ponderous' in preference to the Quarto's old-fashioned double comparative 'more richer'". Yet the latter, as Vicker shows, has many more, clear links with the notion of value, in various senses, as expressed in several other details in this scene. See *The One 'King Lear'* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016, 210-211.

will they secure their part of the kingdom. (Some critics have gone so far as to claim that Lear is basically *extorting* filial allegiance from his daughters here as a necessary compensation for his abdication of power not to mention his generosity in proceeding to this.[196]) The sense of these words[197]—"Since now we will divest us"—is clear and straightforward: Lear's daughters are being asked to express their "love" *on the occasion of* his abdication quite simply, not with reference to any greater share that they might have by speaking in some greater way (and not because Lear is seeking to compel loyalty from his daughters for the future in some overbearing "legal" way[198]). Lear's sense of what is entailed in "most", as we have seen, is one that is already predetermined towards Cordelia's "love", which is to say it only has anything to do with his strictly emotional-romantic intentions about a future life with her.

As for this "most" in Lear's riddle, as well as its consequence, "That we our largest bounty may *extend*", we need to continue to keep in mind that all this points to the terms of the pre-concluded end. They are in the meantime obviously and intentionally ambiguous terms *in the way of* a riddle meaningfully intended to deflect from its actual resolution. Lear's largest *bounty* is in the nature of what will be a surprise; it alludes to something beyond the terms of the division of the kingdom, and we may even suppose that everyone at this event understands that this is so, and that when Lear's daughters set out to answer the riddle it is what they too have in mind in reaching out quite blindly for more—to be rendered thus blind is again in the nature of the effect of a riddle. Lear's elaborately designed riddle creates, in fact, an occasion of great charm and wonder; apart from masking a pre-concluded focus on the new life of love Lear anticipates he can now give himself to with Cordelia, it is conceived out of marvellous impulse of social humour, and is or should come across as frankly marvellous fun (as, no doubt, it would have been perceived by the play's original audience).[199] There is no plan up Lear's sleeve to penalize his daughters for falling short in their effort of expression or any such threat as critics have imputed to him, as that he might possibly withdraw any portion of his gift of a

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[196] See, e.g., Fraser (4): "Lear knows very well what he is up to, and in particular he knows what he means by 'love' - he means obedience. Ironically, it is because he foresees that his kind of love might fall off where the power to command it is lacking that he seeks this public affirmation [from his daughters]."

[197] This is at least *Lear*'s intention in speaking these words, whatever larger, ironic suggestions may have been intended by the author that are related to later action in the play, which we have covered above.

[198] Once again, Grene (152) makes the appropriate point that the professions of love serve merely to acknowledge formally what is already taken for granted as a natural condition between father and daughters: "It is this uncontractual contract between parental generosity and filial love which is to be celebrated".

[199] Though this is hardly how moralizing critics will choose to see it, who are quick to resort to judgments about free-spirited "fun." In this matter and others in this scene, Lear is not all about the laughable seriousness that Fraser would impute to him. My apologies as for Fraser, who turns out to be my principal butt in these pages. **See above p.1.**

kingdom to any of his daughters should any fall short in some unanticipated way of satisfying Lear's emotional demands (on what grounds would that be that would satisfy everyone? How much land would anyone be losing relative to what degree of failure in expressing love? Surely *no* one with any degree of mind could pretend to determine things in this way.) Having so scrupulously apportioned an equal measure of land and of power to each of his daughters, in order precisely to avert all future strife, is it at all likely that Lear would now proceed to have his daughters competing with each other to have the greatest share of the kingdom? (and depending on what answer? and on what basis to decide this to everyone's satisfaction??) That Lear is seen, of all things, in the end stripping *Cordelia* of her dowry—she for whom the whole event has been framed—is not a contradiction of these terms, but rather as we shall see, a horrible logical deduction from the radical *new* terms Cordelia has in the meantime herself imposed on the moment—on what basis we shall be looking into in some depth, below.

### *(vi)*
### *Goneril's Response* versus *Regan's Response*

On the occasion of his formal abdication of power, a King of advanced age would celebrate (and perhaps even finally redeem) the bond that exists between himself and his daughters, as one who is now in love with love. An actor playing Lear shall make us feel this altogether, even if on first viewing we cannot know who the special focus of Lear's love is. On the other hand, knowing this play, and that a new life with Cordelia is the goal of this love, an initiated audience will come to see everything in this scene in relation to Lear's actual purpose. In the meantime, this King, in projecting the event forward, has created a marvellously powerful rhythmic movement into which the first daughter to speak, Goneril, enters quite naturally. It should surprise and impress us, in fact, that she *can* enter so well into the situation that has been thus very suddenly created, responding instinctively to the import of Lear's riddle exactly as one might who was suddenly caught up in the excitement of a game. I have said "so well" because, in spite of the inevitable position one takes about Goneril in the long term, her speech, as a response to Lear's riddle, is right on the mark. If not in impulse, in manifest content at least, her speech is almost the one Cordelia might have spoken to communicate herself, while being at the same time radically different from that which Regan will deliver in short order.[200]

[200] Farley-Hills (185) duly noted, with reference to their prototypes in Grimaldi's story, that "Shakespeare has changed Gonorill's speech in the old text" and that he echoes the opening line of Cordella's response in Goneril's "I love you more than words" etc. Of Goneril's speech Farley-Hills says that it is "fulsome, of course, but certainly not more so than the language habitually served up for royalty in Jacobean England." Among other things Shakespeare changed Gonorill's speech "to emphasize the deference owed to the great King", in contrast with Cordelia's "blatant defiance of propriety". Farley-Hills (186) highlights the perverse inversion that has

It is another strange peculiarity of the criticism on this play, and a sign of its wilful blindness and deliberate indifference to distinctions, that the two speeches, by Goneril and Regan, should be conflated as if they had the same value and were saying the same thing. At the same time, I say only "*almost* the one Cordelia might have spoken" because Goneril's speech is a rhetorical one, although only as an answer to a riddle in a game will be, quite naturally:

> *Sir, I love you more than word can wield the matter,*
> *Dearer than eyesight, space, and liberty,*
> *Beyond what can be valued, rich or rare,*
> *No less than life, with grace, health, beauty, honor;*
> *As much as child e'er loved, or father found;*
> *A love that makes breath poor, and speech unable.*
> *Beyond all manner of so much I love you.*

Goneril's speech faithfully reflects what *will* be understood to be in the nature of love. One long-established view of love, running through the centuries, is that it does lie beyond what words can say and, as a spiritual entity, does have a greater value than all forms of material freedom or material value, is inseparable (ideally) from life, health, etc. Goneril's speech does not pretend that love has a value "more than" life (as Regan might allow herself to say) or that her love is "greater than" that of any other child, etc.: all is kept, in the end, within a proper compass. One feels within this speech the reflection of a mind that is trying to reach to the most appropriate way of expressing what love is while acknowledging that there are inevitable limits to that expression, and even showing some anxiety about getting it right. As an answer to Lear's riddle, at this high courtly level of ceremonial celebration not without a touch of mischievous fun, Goneril's response is, in fact, just right. There is no suggestion of actually overdoing it, or any impression given of a sickening flattery whatever. It is not in the nature of the effect Shakespeare is seeking to create with this scene to bring to its unfolding any idea of who Goneril is as given later. Insofar as the daughters are concerned, this scene is as a frieze from which each daughter emerges, almost marvellously, in a certain light as she speaks. Nothing of the horrible qualities that will gradually show in Goneril later is intended here. The Goneril that is presented here is, almost as in a fairy-tale, a character who is literally tied down to what this rhetorical speech says as an answer to a riddle that is itself strangely marvellous and absorbing.

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taken place in critical estimates of the action in our time especially: "[Lear's] failure to detect flattery in the voice of decorum and love in the voice of rudeness has been condemned by an age as suspicious of politeness as it is approving of the kind of personal integrity that discounts the feelings of others". As I show in these pages, it is more than a matter simply of "politeness", nor can we really speak of "personal integrity" in the case of Cordelia as for her behavior in this scene, as I show below.

This King and father[201] answers Goneril's speech by now formally conferring on her and hers all the land that he has portioned out for them in an already dramatically public, already final, way. Goneril's forthcoming speech has thus had the function of simply signing a line on a document already prepared. The speeches of Lear's daughters are *meant* to be pure formalities. What Lear would create is simply a fine ceremonial congruency between the ludic performance of his daughter's speeches and the King's grand, already final gesture of the bestowal of land and power. We are in the presence of royalty also on the daughters' side, and we must imagine women whose education will have surely prepared them for the simple rhetorical social ability that is thus playfully called for in these circumstances. With his answer to Goneril's speech Lear carries on in the powerful rhythmic way in which he has initiated these proceedings, a rhythm into which Goneril is caught up in her own speech (this being, of course, the rhythm of Shakespear's own blank verse which is here given a purpose unique to the play's situation). As for Lear's reply, one is struck especially by the richness of its evocation, Lear taking the time to bring out the wondrous beauty of the land of which he is now making a gift to Goneril for good: "With shadowy forests and with champains riched/With plenteous rivers and wide-skirted meads,/We make thee lady". As we shall see, Lear's expansive response to Goneril's speech contrasts dramatically with the significantly more muted terms in which Lear will reply to Regan's speech, for a reason as well known to him as it is to everyone else (our audienceship included). But for the moment Lear addresses Regan with the equality he has fixed on for all concerned, masterfully balancing the reference just before to "thine [i.e., Goneril's] and Albany's issue" with one now to "Our dearest Regan, wife to Cornwall", in this way setting up his second daughter to speak. Here again Shakespeare offers us a remarkably studied presentation: Regan speaks with reference back to Goneril's terms for very close to half of her speech (this half being exactly three and a half lines), going on in the second half (also for three and half lines) to seek to outdo her sister's terms by pretending finally to a total and exclusive love for Lear beyond what can possibly be true. Finally, her outriding last line (the eighth) settles, in this impossibly strained way, triumphantly on what she claims is the entire focus of her life, namely "your dear highness' love" (one notes the focus here away from herself, not even on "my love for you" but rather "the love that is all yours").

Clearly here is another carefully balanced, rhetorical speech, and intended by Regan as such. This is how *she* emerges from the frieze-like dimension of this scene that is reserved for Lear's daughters and from which each daughter comes forth as the representative of a distinct position or attitude. Regan's speech clearly showcases the greedy excess of one who, in seeking to win all, has gone beyond the limits of the game (as a perverse child, or a perverse adult,

[201] Lear is not identified by name for the audience until Kent addresses him as "Royal Lear" 125 lines later.

might do). Is Regan's speech not just plain, mindless silliness annoying and embarrassing to all and especially Lear, the vulgar overreaching of one who seriously thinks she will be rewarded with more by proceeding to such an extreme and unreal protestation? Hypocritical is a strange term to be applying to such a gross form of behavior, although this judgment is typical of the critical reaction to this scene. How can someone be accused of being hypocritical who is being so obvious to everyone, including Lear (although again critics are eager to make of him the only one who does not see it—and thus quite a freak of nature, the only one of his kind). Will anyone whosoever fail to see how blatantly unreal Regan's claim is? The short shrift Regan's speech gets from Lear is all to the point. A deliberate terseness is felt not only because Lear's response to Regan is one full line less than the response to Goneril but especially on account of the bareness of the terms and the singular lack of evocation with which he describes that portion of the kingdom that he is allotting her. This portion is referred to, contrastingly with how he bestows her portion on Goneril, in purely abstract terms: "No less in space, validity, and pleasure/Than that conferred on Goneril". Lear is content here with more or less simply repeating himself with Regan. He is quickly passing Regan over, though with as much tact as he can muster in order to continue to support the ceremony, in spite of the bad note that has suddenly entered into it through no fault of his own, He is actively seeing the ceremony through to the last phase, which is all that really absorbs him. Naturally, he would get on to Cordelia: "Now our joy/Although our last and least…" What else was Lear to do? Was he to stop the ceremony in order to declare Regan mindless and unfit and strip her of her dowry for that reason? Could Lear really have expected Regan, a grown-up noblewoman of some education and a royal daughter, to make herself suddenly so silly at this event? Very ably, if not without some embarrassment and irritation of his own, he would not allow Regan's speech to spoil this grand ceremonial occasion, which, after all, is meant to be the final political action Lear is to take with respect to his kingdom and in the course of his rule.

### *(vii)*

### *The Tragic Development*

This is how the action of this scene reads, in fact. There is no hypocrisy in this scene as it presents *itself*, nor is it in any sense a matter of Lear vulgarly feeding on flattery, and especially not to the point of being duped by any hypocrisy, though criticism would make of Lear such a hopeless fool. It is said that Lear wilfully drives his daughters to hypocrisy by hanging over them the threat of losing their portion of the kingdom if they disobey, although how Lear could, in that case, wilfully deny any of his daughters an equal portion of the kingdom without risking the future strife he especially wishes to obviate is, in the meantime, nowhere addressed in this

criticism. Such a view of how this scene plays itself out builds on a very unsubtle conception of dramatic creation, and it is altogether unworthy of Shakespeare's supremely masterful, objective rendering of tragic action in this period of his dramatic career. The tragic event that finally breaks out over this scene, so overwhelming to all and that has made this scene so universally impactful, presents itself as a pure objective development, even if in the end human beings have no choice but to make themselves responsible for it. How, then, shall we do justice to the various elements of this so carefully wrought scene that, together, conspire to bring this tragic event into being ("Let it be so!")? On the one hand, we watch Lear following through with the abdication ceremony with much majesty and with great sweep; on the other, we watch as Cordelia herself gradually comes forth and measure the impact she has on this ceremony with the position and attitude *she* embodies.

### *a) Love's Riddle*

When Lear turns his attention at last to Cordelia, the richly evocative manner he had expressed himself in initially, and that is the main thrust of his address to his daughters in this scene, returns: "Now, our joy/…to whose young love/The vines of France and milk of Burgundy/Strive to be interessed". And now the question (re-phrased) is put to her: "what can you say to draw/A third more opulent than your sisters?" Criticism has not considered this question very closely. What is this "third more opulent" of which Lear speaks? It could hardly be that Lear somehow intends, depending on how she performs, to bestow a greater portion of land on Cordelia than has already been irrevocably assigned to her sisters. Lear cannot at this point take any land away from his other daughters to give to her. This should be clear to everyone at this scene, as it is to us the audience. Are we then to believe that Cordelia's portion of land hides some remarkable treasure in its midst that Lear has reserved especially for her, for surely any such treasure could not, without generating spiteful controversy, be taken from somewhere in the portions of land given over to Goneril and Regan? The idea of any such special reserved treasure is, of course, absurd. What, then, can Lear mean by "a third more opulent"? This is the teasing question to all who are concerned at this ceremony—teasing to all, that is, except ironically Cordelia. All of this points to the object of Lear's magnificent riddle: "opulent" sends us back to "bounty" which in turn along the way has been further associated with "richer love". The associations in this last phrase (spoken by Cordelia in an aside) puts us as audience in a better position to guess at the riddle, although we may be finally excused for not picking up on it as it flies past us. As we have seen, Lear has conceived, as the goal of his riddle, the grand ceremonial gesture—which would, in fact, have been very flattering to Cordelia—of bestowing *himself* upon her (hence "bounty"): in the end, it is to be a way of saying that Cordelia

has entirely won him over to the love between them, to the point even of the renunciation of power. Criticism will be non-plussed to hear it, knowing the worth of Cordelia as they do, that Lear himself knows this best of all. Significantly, for the criticism that would identify his idea of love with land, the opulence Lear has in mind is the opposite of material; it is the opulence of love as it stands in itself, the love between Lear and Cordelia that by now has already been acknowledged by Cordelia in her aside. The final object of this riddle points to this life of love between Lear and Cordelia to which Lear intends to retire. Will anyone, however, have been able to guess at this riddle that has been conceived so marvellously? It is a measure, alas, of the ironic power impenetrable riddles can have that they can confound respondents to the point of bringing out their own inherent attitudes and positions vis-à-vis the teasing terms in which riddles are put—in this case, to the point of catastrophe, but how does this catastrophe actually come about?

Along the way, we have watched Cordelia herself, alongside Goneril and Regan, slowly and in a very studied progression, emerge from the frieze-like dimension of *her* distinctive place in this scene. To understand how she actually comes across to us, once again it is necessary to note differences and to draw distinctions as we go from Goneril's speech to Regan's. Our starting point, also, is the actual, even stunning, appropriateness of Lear's ceremony which, as duly noted, "appears to be accepted by everyone", overall a situation that must drive us to the question "why Cordelia cannot go along."[202] On this question our critic remains tentative: "it is not entirely clear why Cordelia cannot go along with her father's love test and say in public what he evidently expected her to say."[203] I take this last phrase to mean what Lear expected Cordelia to say as a response spoken quite simply and naturally out of the love she has for him and which they obviously share already. Our critic would begin to explain Cordelia's refusal to go along as follows: "she would not obey because this would apparently mean breaking some principle in which she firmly believes." [204] He is more forthcoming farther along: "she remains silent in the name of a principle that can be called a refusal to speak in public about one's private feelings." This may or may not be the case, but to support his argument our critic feels pressed to fall back on speculation: "it may well be that this is her first public appearance as the king's youngest daughter, now come of age." Another aspect to this view is that "Cordelia is too young to have a fully developed public persona." All this to explain the aside that first represents her, spoken at once to herself *and* to the audience as if Shakespeare were alerting it to another drama that is to unfold alongside the ongoing ceremony:

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[202] Sadowski 227.
[203] Sadowski 242.
[204] Sadowski 243.

*What shall Cordelia speak? Love, and be silent.*

### *b) Insecurity and Uncertainty*

To maintain at once on the basis only of these words that Cordelia is already clear about the principle she stands for, whatever that may be, is to rush headlong into interpretation. It is to pass over what is the obvious uncertainty, even the sense of sudden insecurity, that comes through in the words "What shall Cordelia speak?" Goneril has just finished delivering a speech that, from a certain point of view, is no less than fully appropriate in the specific terms of this ceremony. Emerging in this context, Cordelia's words, spoken promptly upon Goneril's speech, have the undeniable effect, in the first instance, of suggesting that Cordelia is comparing herself to Goneril. "What shall Cordelia speak?" How shall Cordelia manage in comparison with what she has just heard delivered by Goneril?[205] As for the principle of not speaking in public what one feels privately, this is not what is emphasized to us at first and is only (in some form of projection read into the lines from what might be more substantially inferred from the rest of the scene) *potentially* suggested in the words that follow: "Love, and be silent." These words in context are simply indicating that Cordelia is falling back for the moment on what she does feel sure about in the context of sudden insecurity, which is her love. It is far from clear from these words that Cordelia has already taken the resolve not to speak at the ceremony; she is simply as yet still unsure as to how she will speak (a possibility that is, in fact, still very present to her) or whether she will be able to speak at all. In contrast with Goneril and Regan, Cordelia does not represent an already settled position but is clearly only gradually coming into a

[205] Grene (152-153) notes as much, though he sees the comparison as invidious in a rather different way. Goneril is said (especially in the last two lines of her speech) to have appropriated what might be Cordelia's own words: "how true this is—of Cordelia". We have seen (in n.18) that Shakespeare deliberately intends this, but Grene's viewpoint is the typically prejudicial one that Goneril, like her sister, speaks here as a morally unsound human being: "Goneril and Regan … make their public declarations of love seem obscenity". As for Goneril specifically, she "has corrupted the language in which love might be spoken", and consequently, *already* at this point in the scene "there are no words left for Cordelia." However, there is nothing in the *text* of this scene to suggest that Shakespeare is presenting Goneril (or Regan) in this way. On the contrary all is decorum here, until Regan momentarily damages the event with *her* words. It is not that Cordelia immediately has the moral perception that words have been corrupted (let alone made obscene) but rather that, after a speech spoken so well, Cordelia panics about her ability to perform verbally at this social level, a straightforward case of anxiety about speaking at this event. This last point I develop at length below. Grene's viewpoint on Goneril and Regan in fact contradicts his fundamental position (as seen above in n.7) that "no contingencies of plot weaken the dramatic sovereignty of the scene", and that "[i]t seems inappropriate to interrogate … motives at the level of individual character". Grene allows that this is true in the case of Lear, but it should therefore be also true of Goneril and Regan. The only ulterior motives that begin to *show* in this opening scene are Cordelia's, on which much more below.

position. We experience what she stands for, or is to stand for, moment by moment as her position is taking shape, nor are we at all certain how she will come forth.

In the meantime Lear enters forthwith into his own wonderfully expressive account of the disposition of the lands Goneril is now formally inheriting from the King (as looked into above). This marvellous talk, one can easily imagine, would have the effect on Cordelia of greatly intensifying her own sense of uncertainty and insecurity as to how she can express herself. Also, especially while she demurs for whatever reason, she is stepping out of the whole stream of the moment's activity, thereby dispossessing herself all the more of the possibility of rising to the occasion to satisfy her own part in these proceedings. Hearing from Cordelia as we have, our focus has by now biforcated, dwelling at once on Lear and Regan, who are carrying on with proceedings, and on Cordelia and how she is getting on with herself. Fourteen full lines intervene between Cordelia's first aside and her second. Over that time Lear continues to fill out the scene grandly with his marvellous talk about the natural beauty and commodity of the lands he is giving away, turning next to Regan.

### *c) Seizing on a Pretext*

At first, as we have seen, Regan speaks in a certain tandem with Goneril, acknowledging her own share, up to a point, in the same view her sister has expressed: the ceremony is taking its course, that is, on the same level (and at the same almost precipitous pace) in which it has proceeded from the first. This is the case until about half way through Regan's speech. Up to that point Cordelia's position cannot have changed; there is no basis for supposing any further development in her ruminations, and it is indeed only on hearing Regan take the ceremony into absurdly unreal territory that Cordelia's position takes shape at last. Cordelia now seizes on the embarrassing unreality of Regan's claims to support herself in a position which is to be based on a judgment of the obvious falseness of such claims, to which Cordelia will return. Clearly she has seized on these claims—where until now she has had no basis for knowing how she will comport herself—as a pretext for stepping out of the ceremony altogether, which we have seen she is already *inclined* to do for quite other reasons that have never been fully acknowledged by critics. Now Cordelia has a case for herself: she sees herself in her now assumed position as pitiful and dispossessed already: "Then poor Cordelia!" In fact, she has predetermined this outcome, but/and she has in the meantime been given a way of looking like/being someone who knows what she stands for, a principle: "And yet not so; since I am sure, my love's/More richer than my tongue."

That love cannot be expressed in the way Lear's ceremony has playfully called for has become Cordelia's imposed counter-view of that situation. To what extent was Cordelia

already disposed to this view in her initial reaction to the situation? She does not speak her first aside until after Goneril has responded to Lear's remarkable proposition: her aside, in other words, is not a reaction to that proposition, and, what's more, as we have seen Goneril has not given Cordelia any reason for rejecting that proposition. Cordelia is, consequently, far from having formulated her position here. In the same way, at the other end, Cordelia assumes her position *before* Lear has reacted to Regan; although she does not know how he will react, her position has already been taken. It cannot be, then, a judgment on Lear's putative readiness to be flattered, as has so often been claimed about Lear by critics. Cordelia's judgment of the ceremony is not a pure one, is not one formulated from the first out of principles she already holds to. What's more, that judgment is only tangential at best, with an application to Regan's speech alone. Everything points to the understanding that the real, rather than the assumed, reason for Cordelia balking at the ceremony Lear has proposed is that she has decided (or rather seriously believes until the matter is decided for her) that she cannot express herself at the level Lear's ceremony is requiring of her.

### *d) At a Loss to Perform*

Surely we do not have the option of falling back on the view of our critic that this may be Cordelia's "first public appearance as Lear's youngest daughter", or that she is "too young to have a fully developed public persona." Can we seriously believe that Lear would have risked himself at this conclusive ceremony, which depends for its success entirely on Cordelia's participation in it, by involving her as one so socially inexperienced, and especially if this is her first time? (Would there not, in the meantime, have been any social experience at this court over the years, or would Lear's kingdom never before have been visited by dignitaries who would have had to be entertained, by his daughters also? Cordelia, what is more, demonstrates a strong-mindedness that at least for a time in this scene is equal to Lear's, and such strong-mindedness is not learned or practised in a social void.) No. Unexpectedly, suddenly, Cordelia cannot come through. From the first she cannot see *herself* speaking ("What shall Cordelia speak?"), is at a loss suddenly to perform in quite this way, in the context even of an arranged competition, at which one of her sisters has already performed so well. One might claim about her a certain form of panic attack before the prospect of speaking in this context, nor can one rule out that the fundamental problem lies in her *constitutional* inability to speak at this level of social activity, with its complex if fascinating mixture of formal seriousness and ludic spirit. Cordelia compares herself to the way her sister has performed instead of standing by what she is and naturally speaking out of herself (which is all that Lear expects of her). But then (at the last minute) she is handed a way out, a "principle" by which she can stand without losing face.

She would otherwise have stood there exposed to all concerned in all her insecurity, indecision, and lack of address: suddenly faced with the abyss of herself.

There is, in fact, nothing free about Cordelia here, nothing of what has been wishfully described as free spirit (Sun 2). On the contrary, here is an assumed form of (quasi-puritanical) judgment that would wilfully spy into abuses in order to mask a fundamental inability to come forth freely, in the context of a social event where a free spirit *is* expressing itself playfully (does Cordelia show anywhere in this play a disposition to play?) All Cordelia is being asked to do, in this context, is to come forth simply on her own behalf. Certainly some of the spirit of playfulness that interweaves through this scene has dissipated after Regan has spoken, but, as we have seen, Lear deals with Regan's absurd *faux pas* by quickly if tactfully passing her over: the basic tone of serious ceremonial intent remains at the same time uncompromised; the grand, insistent, forward-moving momentum is masterfully maintained. Coming in this way at last to Cordelia, Lear immediately returns to the grand description of a natural bounty that he is at this moment inclined to see everywhere, carrying on in the lavish tones with which he had described to Goneril the lands he is giving away and which he now applies to what Cordelia's suitors are offering to her: "To whose young love/The vines of France and milk of Burgundy strive to be interessed." The world's natural bounty waits on Cordelia's love—with the advantage of knowing Lear's whole purpose in devising this ceremony, it is not difficult to see why Lear would entertain this view. For up to as many as forty lines of this scene, the momentum of this ceremony has been sustained grandly, without interruption or gaps of any kind (Lear himself having seen to this, in spite of Regan's sudden mindless aberration)—until Cordelia, hanging back, proudly balks before the whole event, suddenly precipitating the grand energy of this scene towards an incomprehensible void that opens up for everyone, including herself:

> Lear. —*Now, our joy,*
> *Although our last and least, to whose young love*
> *The vines of France and milk of Burgundy*
> *Strive to be interessed, what can you say to draw*
> *A third more opulent than your sisters? Speak.*
>
> Cordelia.
> *Nothing, my lord. / / /*
>
> Lear.
> *Nothing! / / / /*

Cordelia
*Nothing. / / / /*

*e) Going Nowhere*

What is not commonly known, at least among general readers, is what Shakespeare is doing here with his verse. Until now every single beat of that iambic verse has been filled out grandly; then, suddenly, the whole scene grows almost preternaturally, and for all others unaccountably, silent. Across the first three "Nothing"'s spoken, over three lines, there are as many as eleven full silent beats. There could not be a more extreme counter-development, just to consider the effect in rhythmic terms. It is like going into a wild skid. Lear has been taking the ceremony forward with great speed and power, and now the whole scene spins off in quite another direction, to others suddenly a direction breathtakingly inexplicable except for the fact that it already comes across as a deliberate balking of the ceremony. It is remarkable, but a clear symptom of the extent of the general bias against Lear and for Cordelia, that anyone should see in this sudden, sombre refusal to participate at all an impulse to "dialogue", an "interlocutive" gesture, calling on Lear to re-address, in mid-event, the import of this ceremony. What would Cordelia have Lear do at this point? Stop the event right there? And carry on, how, and with what? He has already given away two thirds of his kingdom irrevocably, and he hovers as it were in mid-air (or rather suddenly deprived of air) just as he is about to settle the whole event. And what if the whole thing had stopped at Cordelia's "Nothing" (the second "Nothing" even), assuming that no one was to intervene with any other word at this point? For our champion of "interlocution", presumably Cordelia would have gone on to involve Lear in a discussion about the terms of his ceremony, how unsuitable, how misleading, even perverse it all is (the part at least about speaking love). But why does Cordelia not therefore proceed to do so? Instead she greatly protracts the silence she has created without offering relief or explanation of any kind, and over eleven full beats of verse-time when she might have spoken up at any turn. The possibility to "dialogue" was there, but she does not use it, is at no point intent on doing so. [206] Only consider, then, where Cordelia would have taken the human scene, if Lear had not intervened, as he eventually does, to help set the moment back on an existential footing, any existential footing. This scene would have been nowhere, and would have been going nowhere where human beings live, breathe, and speak. There is something indeed monstrous about this

[206] Quite to the point, Spinosa (166) notes of Cordelia's speeches generally that these "are absolutes that block further engagement". This is one side to her speeches; the other side to them is no less damaging, as we shall see: "[Cordelia] may disdain… talking … but she can inflect the tone of her words as well as anyone else in the play"(165).

moment that Cordelia has created. A veritable monster of utter inconsequence has suddenly raised its head here.

I come back to what Cordelia would expect Lear to do at this point. Clearly she (not to mention our champion of interlocution) has given no thought whatever to that situation. Lear has by now already given away two thirds of his land by a legal action that is irreversible (and this in spite of Kent's later unreal notion, spoken out of an angry will that would itself pretend to impose on reality, that Lear can still "reserve his state" and "revoke his gift"): "to thine and Albany's issue/Be this perpetual"; "to thee and thine hereditary ever/Remain"[207]. Lear now sits there with only one third of his kingdom left at his disposal, two thirds of the way through as it were a trapeze act: Cordelia's "Nothing" has opened up a sphere of terror in which a proper survival for everyone seems doomed, for Lear and also for herself. Happily, Lear does masterfully intervene at this point, showing a formidable capacity for self-possession in the circumstances, speaking the following perhaps even with prodding humour:

*Nothing will come of nothing: speak again.*

In this way Lear re-creates for Cordelia the kind of room that would allow them both to recover from the unspoken, formless terror that has been opened up in that moment. Cordelia herself seems in some degree aware of this terror and immediately begins to speak up in response. With some uncertainty (reflecting, in part, her momentary immersion in the terror) and some hesitation (for she had not counted on speaking)—"Unhappy that I am"—she manages to find once again the judgmental position that had happily come to hand: "I cannot heave/My heart into my mouth". She goes on to offer with reference to *this* position what is at least the beginning of an answer to the ceremonial question: "I love your majesty/According to my bond, no more nor less." Her response, however, is not only *intentionally* wanting in content, it is graceless; even more to the point, it has been spoken with a deliberate bite that continues to make an impression of inexplicably antagonistic behavior. How can Lear take this as a proper answer without seeming absurd to all? "That is very good", Lear might have said? "And now I bestow upon you this opulent third, and to put a cap on your answer, it is you I choose to spend the rest of my life with"!?

Happily, again Lear relieves Cordelia of her obviously troubled position: "How, how Cordelia? Mend your speech a little/Lest it may mar your fortunes," once again with a

[207]Assuming that Kent's words apply retroactively to Lear's gift to his elder daughters, which is not at all clear, Kent's idea that Lear reserves the power to undo an action already made legal lacks all possible application since Lear has already given up the authority on which he would depend in order to revoke his gift. More on this below.

masterfully tolerant and affectionate prodding, to which Cordelia's response is again immediate. She has given no indication that she plans to continue from "no more, nor less", but, after this prodding, is now doing so by way of elaboration: "You have begot me, bred me, loved me "etc., expression which is now at least on its way as a proper response on this occasion. Yet unwilling, or unable, to follow through with this preamble, she wilfully reverts to her judgment, turning her attention back rather upon her sisters whom she now insists on exposing for the falseness of their claims, inasmuch as they pretend to make everything of their father as if they had no husbands, etc. Cordelia might have gone through with her own self-expression, had begun to carry on with it, but in the end she cannot help herself. As a matter of fact, it is only Regan who has made the outlandish claim, although Cordelia pretends that both of her sisters have done so: she is re-writing this event after her own mind, making it into how she wants it to be seen than how it actually comes across, in its fullest terms. As if Lear does not know that the affections of daughters are, naturally, shared between father and husband and, moreover, a good number of other people. He has after all precipitated his abdication in order to make it possible for Cordelia to marry well, to whom "the vines of France and milk of Burgundy/ Strive to be interessed." By now we are indeed skidding wildly again, well off-course in any sense, Cordelia inexplicably challenging without discussion and without reason, and pressing ruin for both herself and Lear, in the name suddenly of a principle that has been very poorly, and in quite the wrong circumstances, presented and assumed. Cordelia shows herself, very simply, socially more than inept in these circumstances, and she is trying to make up for this by imposing what is but one part of the scene upon the whole as if it were the whole, wilfully disqualifying Lear of any right sense when it comes to fathers and daughters, and making her own special claim in the process to a unique honesty and sincerity, in spite of her searingly biting, antagonistic tone:

> *Why have my sisters husbands if they say*
> *They love you all?*
> .....
> *Surely I shall never marry like my sisters*
> *To love my father all.*

Once again one asks the question: where, if anywhere, could Cordelia possibly expect the event to go from here?

### *f) Bringing Everything to Nothing*

Another ten silent beats in the verse, marked by great dismay in Lear and a terrible uncertainty for them both, qualify the further exchange between Lear and Cordelia that follows.

Two silent full beats punctuate the end of Cordelia's tirade against her sisters' falseness, which has had the effect of also targetting Lear personally, who must feel a searing pain from taking the brunt of Cordelia's antagonism:

> *they say*
> *They love you all?*
>
> *To love my father all.*

the additional imputation being that Lear must be quite stupid to countenance the unreal claim of his daughters (Cordelia's inflected use of "all" in both cases serving deliberately as a sharp dart aimed finally at him[208]). In spite of which, for yet a third time Lear gives Cordelia a chance to recover herself by asking her if such a wild, antagonistic expression of her position can possibly represent what she feels in her heart (she has, in the meantime, made a claim that her own "heart" cannot be "heaved into her mouth"):

> *But goes thy heart with this? / /*
> *Ay, good my lord. / / /*

But her heart, very clearly, cannot go with this *or* with the claim that her filial bond alone represents her—so clearly, in this latter case, as to have prompted the view from one critic that this claim is "a notorious lie" (Spinosa).[209] Cordelia's response to Lear's probing question in the present instance is spoken heatedly and up to a point unthinkingly. She is blindly adhering to her position because she is by now entrenched in it. It is hardly intended as a lie, and yet it is the opposite of true. We note, once again, four more silent beats that surround this exchange—while everyone hovers breathlessly as over an abyss—until Lear decides to take Cordelia at her word and to pursue the logic of her own false case to its conclusion: "How can the heart, your heart which you say bears your love, be, then, so untender?" the answer to which, after yet another pause of two silent beats of tense dismay, uncertainty, panic most likely, and near-abysmal confusion, breaks all bounds of proper sense, even if it appears as a strong position to be taking and Cordelia pretends to save face with it:

> *So young and so untender? / /*
> *So young, my lord, and true. / /*

Once again, Cordelia brings the whole scene, and all those associated with it and whose lives depend on it, to the brink of non-existence, non-being, a perfectly stifling situation without breath, without speech, without relief or any offer of any alternative life that everyone

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[208] Cf. the second part of n.25.
[209] Spinosa 166.

might proceed to engage in from here. Here is someone who has rather decided and actually managed to bring nothingness into being by her power of total resistance to the ongoing stream of life itself, by her choice of an absolute power of non-participation. In her terms, there will be nothing, then, nothing more, and this condition secured by sitting on a case that is rooted in falsehood of her own, as that "her heart can go with this" and that she can even claim to be "true" in standing by this position. Reacting ourselves to the mad authority Cordelia has by these means appropriated to herself, we will ask, with the advantage of our own readerly detachment from this action, among many other things: what is truth, then? Whereto from here?

The position Cordelia finally assumes in this scene is absolute and brings everything to nothing. Out of that nothing, *ex nihilo*, will come a power, then, that must, by an absolute necessity, in turn re-fill the void that has been created, with life: "Let it be so!": the divine *fiat*. There *is* life, there *is* a creation: "the sacred radiance of the sun,/The mysteries of Hecate and the night,/ … the operation of the orbs/From whom we do exist and cease to be." That Lear, in the meantime, should be forced to go from his knowledge of the depth of love he has shared with Cordelia, in this trice of time, to Cordelia's stridently unfeeling caricature of it, watching this love reduced to a confrontational claim, from which Cordelia cannot be dissuaded, that it is no more nor less than the bare "bond" between them, and only to be negatively defined, as being but half of the love she has to bestow, etc., and that *this* is the *truth* of the love she bears for him, which he is in no position to gainsay, his own fortunes so frightfully suspended as to be left at a political and military disadvantage with only one third of his kingdom reserved, his entire vision of life for himself and for Cordelia, which was to be his crowning act as King, at his advanced age now nullified: is it any wonder that Lear from this point on should despair of his life and his future?

The fullness of the love between them being denied, Lear can, as we see more and more, but despair of everything that concerns him as for a future. He must, in the meantime, breathe air, speak, act (short of doing away with himself in despair), and in his own response to Cordelia he re-affirms himself in his own position, opposing to the truth of Cordelia's "nothing" the equally valid truth of his power over her dowry, now that the question of truth has descended to this level. Lear despairingly descends to the level of Cordelia's own logic, where he concludes from her own premise: "thy truth then be thy dower", since Cordelia would make everything of this truth and nothing of the event at hand that absorbs everyone else and which touches on considerations also of her own fortunes ('is this event really shot through and through with the falseness that you claim of it all?—let the consequences of this view of it follow, then.') There is a horrible power of logic to what Lear himself pretends to do now, also from another angle: 'since you deny the real truth of what there has been between us and stand

immoveably by your power to appropriate everything to yourself, be entirely this "truth" of what you are that you claim is everything, and be no longer, then, my daughter, since by this truth by which you bring everything to nothing, you deny the whole basis of our creation, the very basis of our familial bonding which this creation supports and from which you have excluded yourself in spite of your *words* about a "bond" between us'. Cordelia's pretended position (itself based in a horrible reduction of the situation) and Lear's reaction to it (horrible in turn) are of one piece. The position to which Lear is now driven is itself only as horribly 'true' as Cordelia's is: "For by the sacred radiance of the sun … Here I disclaim all my paternal care" etc. Life here has indeed re-filled the void that Cordelia has opened up by her extreme non-participation, but it is a horribly distorted and disturbed life that has filled it. A force of universal energy breaks out in Lear's titanic outburst in this moment, horribly skewed at once by Cordelia's wrong-headedness in confrontation as well as by Lear's wrong-headedness in reaction to this.

Lear, however, takes this situation considerably further, his own extreme behaviour being a measure at once of the depth of his love (very strange as it is to say so) which here instantaneously transmutes into a hate of equal proportion, as well as of the horrid extent of his *own* pride, which motivates that hate, and which Lear feels he must now marshal over and against the pride Cordelia has directed against him. Lear passes well beyond disclaiming "his paternal care": he horribly pursues a still deeper logic; he goes on to insinuate that by her anti-filial behavior Cordelia has touched a depth of inhumanity that has made her as horrible as the "barbarous Scythian" that "makes his generation messes" etc. Behind Lear's comparison is the imputation that Cordelia by her inhumanity has eaten him up, just as he is now in the process of eating her up. Like has bred like, but it is of the greatest significance (and this is what makes the sudden extreme inversion in this moment so horrible) that all stems from the very depth of the love that Lear shared with Cordelia, Lear immediately calling attention to this love upon elaborating this comparison and being challenged by Kent at this moment:

> *Peace, Kent.*
> *Come not between the dragon and his wrath.*
> *I loved her most and thought to set my rest*
> *On her kind nursery.* [To Cordelia] *Hence and avoid my sight!—*
> *So be my grave my peace as here I give*
> *Her father's heart from her.* [i.e., take back my heart].

There is to be no life of love to look forward to any longer—that intensely anticipated life which was the whole purpose and goal of Lear's ceremonial leave-taking and which, though

it was likely to be of short duration, for that very reason was all the more treasured; there will indeed be nothing of a future life to give himself to at all. The whole purpose of his ceremony, which is now revealed to all, has been turned horribly on its head, and Lear, in spite of his thunder-and-lightning heroics is already in a final despair. Standing horribly by the logic of Cordelia's implied indifference to her fortunes, he allows himself to go so far as to give away her third of the kingdom to his other daughters, and in doing so gives away all that he has left of his own, thereby putting his life into the hands of those daughters whose cold-hearted natures he must surely know. He has dispossessed Cordelia utterly, but he has also dispossessed himself. He and Cordelia shall continue as one in their fortunes, and I believe that this is how Lear *wants* it to be, in the depths of his own being. It is the last measure of his despair, and he seals it by roughly throwing his crown at his other daughters (it is an appropriate way of staging the moment), as if one crown could be 'parted', as he puts it, in two, and with this gesture goes the dream also of averting "future strife." Lear has spoken from the depths, but it does not follow that he lives in those depths quite consciously nor could he be expected to do so: short of doing away with himself, he must live on, and living on he makes the necessary arrangements, in passing, for his own defense by reserving a hundred knights as his company. In the meantime he also has the due respect of his daughters to rely on, conforming with what would be expected of them simply as a matter of social decency and regard for his person as the King he has been and will remain officially. He, along with all official society, could expect no less of them.

### *(viii)*

### *Afterthoughts*

#### *a) The Scene as Given*

We will be inevitably baffled by the many different layers of Shakespeare's presentation at this point, which is yet far from untypical of him, especially in his mature (or middle) tragedies. I have been elaborating on the deep psychology of the confrontation between Cordelia and Lear, not to mention the metaphysics of it, by way of an approach which we make from a position of some leisure. In the meantime, there is the very real danger of reading back into the play's opening scene what we come to gather about the play's characters from familiarity with the later action. I have already indicated one way in which we will be guilty of this, by seeing Goneril and Regan as already in the first scene the devious characters whom we come to know later. Not only is this not how the scene comes across to someone who is viewing the play for the first time without having read it, it is not where these characters are themselves at the beginning of this action. I have remarked on the frieze-like dimension of this scene from which Lear's daughters emerge. One way or the other, for the pristine viewer or the

experienced reader, it is the extraordinary innocence of this scene in its original design or as Lear has set it up that should impress us. These characters, all of them, just do not know what they are getting into or what lies in wait for them, a point Shakespeare is already making, as we have seen through the play's many subtextual allusions, before anything happens to suggest that any such developments will follow.

Especially does the bias against Goneril and Regan and against Lear and for Cordelia, stemming as this does from familiarity with the later action, stand in the way of a proper experience of this scene. The scene presents a picture that is, in fact, the direct opposite of all that we are exposed to later: *two elder daughters* who appear to us as relatively innocent in the context of the gamesome ceremony that is taking place, even if one and only the one mindlessly oversteps the decent limits of this ceremony; *a King* who is himself utterly competent and confident of his purposes by this point in his life, exceptionally gracious in this moment and who is bent on making of the event the happiest event he can imagine for all concerned; and *a youngest daughter* who comes across herself as the opposite of innocent, wilfully intent on seeing a monster in the whole proceedings where no such monster has appeared, except by her own creation. The danger for us will lie in failing to observe the radical demarcation line that separates the ritual ceremony itself in its own innocent tendency and direction, which aims at a happy world for all, and how the characters eventually show themselves *after* the debacle, as a consequence of things going horribly wrong for Cordelia and for Lear (the very people who were meant to inherit the best things from this grand ceremony of the bestowal of fortunes). All of these characters could easily have stepped into another world altogether in which good things would have happened for all, if the ritual had simply taken the course it was meant to take. What transpires instead, on a grand heroic scale, is but another version of the kind of bad fortune that will often come to destroy our finest hopes for the best for our own kind (i.e., peace for all), and if Shakespeare points to anything that keeps these hopes from realizing themselves here it is what can be roughly described as a puritanical need in some to sabotage any such general good fortune from a form of jealousy that cannot accept morally, even mentally, inferior people being gifted in this way. Such a judgment on Cordelia's part, levelled indiscriminately at her sisters principally though also glancing at Lear, who is finally made into the main culprit by default, constitutes but a pretext for another characterological deficiency. For Cordelia shows herself radically *unable* to take part in this ludic ritual ceremony: she simply cannot find her way to performance at this level, and on account of *this* drives the event both back upon itself and towards an abyss of non-participation out of which springs the power of nothing to lay waste the whole human scene …

*b) Kent's Re-Writing of the Scene*

Kent's intervention with Lear comes well after the fact. When Lear gives away Goneril's part of the kingdom, we do not hear from Kent; nor do we hear from him when Lear gives away Regan's portion, nor during the whole of the very long and tense exchange between Lear and Cordelia that follows. Not until Lear finally disclaims "all paternal care" of Cordelia and descends to the most terrible expression of his rejection of her does Kent begin to speak up. He is immediately silenced by Lear who then proceeds to divide Cordelia's portion between her sisters. It is at this point that Kent forces his way through to Lear, indulging in some very plain-speaking of his own, treating Lear as a "mad … old man", and coming around to his main point: that Lear must "Reserve his state".

It is unlikely that by then Kent has in mind what Lear has bestowed upon Goneril or Regan as their own portions, against which Kent did not speak out. He rather has in mind Lear's abandonment of Cordelia's portion of the kingdom, which has left Lear without any "state" or power of rule, as distinct from only "the name and all th' addition of a king" which is all Lear now has left and which is now deprived of any base as was the case while he could still settle down with Cordelia (Lear has, by then, blurted out that this was his intention).[210] In his own extremely rough way, Kent is here seeking to come to Lear's defense by defending Cordelia, whom he can hardly see so horribly disowned, and in whose defense Kent insists that her understated words ("low sounds") "[r]everb no hollowness." Is Kent's own wilful coloring of the matter to the point, however? For Lear's reaction has not been to any perceived "hollowness" in Cordelia but rather to her finally unqualified and unabated aggression towards him and the whole event. Kent also accuses Lear, on the other side of his rejection of Cordelia, of bowing to "flattery", thus taking up Cordelia's own view of the event. But, as we have seen, this is a prejudiced view of the whole based on what is only one part of it—in fact, on how that one part is wilfully *taken*, the effect of which is predetermined by Cordelia's judgment. In the context of this scene's ceremonial game, Regan's speech comes across simply as mindless excess, embarrassing to all but still competently handled by Lear who *chooses* to pass it over, for *he like everyone else* can see that this speech has gone too far. To insist on this view of the action is not to justify how Lear finally reacts to Cordelia's push against him, but to show that Kent's

[210] Sadowski (226-227) makes this point himself: "Kent does not intervene … until … the king … loses his patience, unexpectedly cursing and disowning his youngest daughter—a "hideous rashness" that for the sober Kent has immediate disastrous political consequences … [A]fter his rash and unexpected renunciation of Cordelia [and his gift to the others of her portion] he not only deprives the kingdom of the politically balancing center, but also places himself in a very vulnerable and insecure personal position …" Cf. "Revoke thy gift", likewise spoken by Kent.

approach to Lear, like Cordelia's, is itself a skewed view of the ceremonial event, which might still have proceeded to its intended conclusion. In this respect Kent's address will strike Lear as far from being to the point, and indeed a repetition of Cordelia's abuse of him, as for "bow"-ing to "flattery". In fact, Kent does not manage his intervention very well; he gets as angrily involved in the whole situation (and with the same total anger) as Lear does (there seems even to be a competition between them here in will and anger); intended to dissuade Lear, Kent's address has the effect only of inflaming the situation even further. In any event, even if Kent's protestations had been more fairly presented, there is no possibility of Lear's going back on what he has pronounced, even in the case of Cordelia's abandoned portion. For the King has spoken, and what he has spoken has become law, for everyone. The consequence of this ironically is that Lear stands there now without any power of state left to him. Among other things, this finally makes a strange postlude of the rest of the scene where Lear continues to speak and to be heard, by Kent and by Burgundy and France, as a King *de facto*, and understandably (even if they are clearly in collusion and are seizing on any excuse to act) Goneril and Regan have already begun to consider how to rein Lear in: Kent they are probably happy to see go, but a significant rift has been created in the meantime between their England and France.

But this is how Lear has willed the matter at a deeper level, as a gesture of final despair and a death-wish, even if in the meantime he will go on to act as if he knew nothing of what he has done. He forgets what he has willed, and will end up protesting wildly against the very fate he has wished upon himself…

### *c) France's Re-Writing of the Scene*

This scene's action is in several other ways not as we might or would wish to take it. There is the case also of the King of France and the gloss *he* throws over what has transpired. He considers that Cordelia has only shown "a tardiness in nature/Which often leaves the history unspoke/That it intends to do". It is rather extraordinary that France should feel so sure about his interpretation of an event he never witnessed, having been brought out to the scene only afterwards. A natural "tardiness" hardly accounts for the wild antagonism with which Cordelia has presented herself to Lear, not to mention the chaos this has sowed. France's judgment is, in fact, but a response to what Cordelia and Lear both have to say about the event after the fact. By then, Cordelia has firmly settled on her own fixed view of the event, no doubt additionally supported by the interpretation Kent has made of it who has simply gone along with her. She reiterates her view that what has deprived her of the King's favor is "[a] still-soliciting eye and such a tongue/That I am glad I have not though not to have it/Hath lost me in your liking."

Lear by then has obviously come down from the intense focus of his passionate rejection of Cordelia and is carrying on with a more tired reiteration of his own position: reacting to what Cordelia is saying here, he allows himself a more mundane expression of what he expected of her, speaking with a careless bitterness indifferent to the larger import of the confrontation that has taken place. With a now merely ordinary meanness that is more fitting of a domestic conflict, he himself reduces the matter to a stereotypic case of his not being "pleased" by Cordelia (though the larger import continues to break through in "[b]etter … thou/Hadst not been born")—"Better thou/Hadst not been born than not t' have pleased me better". It is in response to these two reductive testimonies working in combination that France comes to his conclusion as to the import of what has taken place: "Is it but this—a tardiness in nature[?]" etc.

France settles on this view even though he has seen for himself that something monstrous did take place. Earlier in his appearance, on hearing Lear reiterate his view of Cordelia as "a wretch whom Nature is ashamed/Almost t' acknowledge hers", he grasps for himself the preternatural momentousness of the change that has come over the scene ("strange" being a word that, in Shakespeare's tragedies, always stands for the preternatural):

> *This is most strange*
> *That she whom even but now was your best object,*
> *The argument of your praise, balm of your age,*
> *The best, the dearest, should in this trice of time*
> *Commit a thing so monstrous to dismantle*
> *So many folds of favor.*

Yet, in spite of recognizing that something quite out of the ordinary has taken place that must tax the understanding, France at once assumes a position in relation to it. He is far from being impartial in his investigations, even when he comes close to grasping the preternatural nature of the events that would have occasioned such a change and the extraordinary "offense" that would have motivated them, which, significantly, he would impute to one person *or* the other, and so if not Cordelia then Lear:

> *Sure her offense*
> *Must be of such unnatural degree*
> *That monsters it, or your forevouched affection*
> *Fall into taint; which to believe of her*
> *Must be a faith that reason without miracle*
> *Should never plant in me.*

In spite of seeing so clearly that something "unnatural" has indeed happened here, France still brings it all down to Lear's overreaction to an inborn reticence in Cordelia: "Is it but this—a tardiness in nature". It is a grand version of the same reduction to which we are ordinarily prone when, to resume the peace, we bring a complex situation down to the easy attitude: "Oh, it's just that, nothing more." In the same way a typical convenient reduction in moral judgment is acted on here which must lay the blame in the end on one person and exculpate the other. Thus must France make his own simple way through this event, and it is just as well, we are happy to think, that life does re-assert itself in this ordinary form of resolution of a conflict, which it would simply get beyond, for Cordelia would really have stood there abandoned entirely to herself. In a way that is as strange as anything else in this extraordinary opening scene, France's feelings for Cordelia suddenly intensify at this point *on the basis of* his own reductive view of the event. His *ignorance* of it is the ground on which he providentially snatches Cordelia up from the jaws of a complete dereliction (such as the one that will hound Lear and company later). France's one simple view of Cordelia is what predisposes him against any serious investigation into what has happened. Cordelia is what he has taken her to be, whatever may have happened, although on other grounds, unwitnessed by him she is no small reason why the ceremonial event has so badly transformed.

One wonders, indeed, what France would have thought had he actually seen Cordelia in action so proudly antagonizing Lear.[211] Cordelia gives no thought to what the effect of her action at the ceremony might be. It is the same when she takes leave of her sisters, with whom she shows no reticence at all when one might expect just that of her here especially. Why, if she knows her sisters to be who she says they are, should she then make them *more* aware of what they are or could be, whetting them on by voicing the harm against Lear they are now in the position to do?—"most loathe", she claims, "to call/Your faults as they are named/…/But, yet, alas, stood I within his grace,/I would prefer him to a better place." Kent does more or less the same (makes them more aware of what they could do than might be the case) on leaving Goneril and Regan: "And your large speeches may your deeds approve". Why would these speeches have anything to do with any harm Goneril and Regan might create? Except for the fact that now, *after* Lear has wilfully put himself in their hands, Kent sees what they *could* do

[211] Although he fails to note the rather significant rift between Goneril's speech and Regan's, Farley-Hills (192, 196) summarizes the ceremonial situation fairly well: "There is nothing exceptional in either Goneril's or Regan's answer to their father's request: their answers are exercises in courtly hyperbole demanded by the occasion. Cordelia's reply, on the other hand, is shocking, and is intended to shock … Certainly the provocations are great; Cordelia's flouting of all decorum to king and father in full court and on such a formal occasion was no light misdemeanour." With this more expansive account, Farley-Hills redeems his earlier, somewhat trite description of Cordelia's behavior as displaying a "startling rudeness".

and points the way for them! While these speeches were spoken, no such possible harm was imagined by anyone looking on, nor could it have been. If Kent and Cordelia can anticipate the harm that could be done to Lear, why would they not seek rather to protect him from the idea of it? Both Kent and Cordelia must have their self-righteousness even at the cost of any real thoughtfulness about Lear, even while they pretend to be defending him. One might almost think that they unconsciously wish this harm for Lear, to bolster themselves in their beleaguered sense of what is morally right, for in their own expression of wilfulness (for the *Lear*-society is nothing if not wilful through and through) they especially wish to be proved right whatever the cost may be! One reputable critic has gone so far as to claim that what Cordelia's speeches to her sisters aim at, as opposed to the narrower import of what they say, is "to confer on Cordelia's sisters the power to mete out the punishments Lear deserves for having cast her away and deprived himself of 'a better place'".[212] I would not go so far as to say that Cordelia actually wishes harm on Lear, but certainly Cordelia, because morally blinded, has given no thought to what actual effect her broaching of the idea to her sisters might and will have.

### *(ix)*
### *The Wrong Cordelia Does in this Scene and the Taboo Against Seeing This*

France, as we have seen, clearly senses that something "monstrous" has taken place between Lear and Cordelia, but in the same breath denies that Cordelia could possibly have had any share in what happened. France immediately adopts this position on the basis of what he says he knows about Cordelia's character, as "the best, the dearest" etc., without stopping to consider that if this is how Lear knew her too (as France acknowledges himself) it really is *very* strange that Lear should "in a trice" have abandoned this view without Cordelia being in any way, if not in some significant way, also responsible for this. France's position can be taken as a paradigm of how criticism has approached the play's opening scene generally. Criticism begins from what amounts to a prejudiced view of Cordelia that becomes very difficult, and is often impossible, to throw off. A.C. Bradley's is the classic case of this, and it is an especially fascinating one because of the characteristically conscientious effort he is otherwise making to enter into the full "tragic" aspect of this scene and Cordelia's implication in the tragedy. Typically of him, in his approach to this scene, Bradley (316-318) starts from an honest confession of the one significant consideration that will affect criticism of it:

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[212] See Harry Berger Jr. *Making Trifles of Terrors: Redistributing Complicities in Shakespeare*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997, p.303.

> *… the devotion she inspires almost inevitably obscures her part in the tragedy … The memory of Cordelia* [from familiarity with her as the rest of the play gives her to us] *thus becomes detached in a manner from the action of the drama. The reader refuses to admit into it any idea of imperfection, and is outraged when any share in her father's sufferings is attributed to the part she plays in this opening scene. Because she was deeply wronged he* [the reader] *is ready to insist that she was wholly right.*

Fighting this deep prejudice about Cordelia, Bradley then makes his slow, conscientious way towards understanding how she is wrong: "[f]or Shakespeare's was the tragic point of view. He exhibits in the opening scene a situation tragic for Cordelia as well as for Lear".

To begin, Bradley refers to "the one demand which she is unable to meet" (318), "a demand", he points out additionally, "other heroines of Shakespeare could have met"[213]. Bradley then considers one way of explaining Cordelia's "failure" (his own term), drawing on what we learn about her characteristic disposition later in the play: "tender emotion … makes her dumb". Even so, he notes himself that this does not fully explain Cordelia's behavior in this scene, although, because of the prevailing view of Cordelia, he is loath to say so: "But—(I am forced to dwell on the point, because I am sure to slur it over is to be false to Shakespeare)—this dumbness of love was not the sole source of misunderstanding" (319-320). On the one hand, he notes"[s]he is not merely silent", and on the other "to tell much less than truth is not to tell it" (321) and he goes still further: "And Cordelia's speech not only tells much less than truth about her love, it actually perverts the truth when it implies that to give love to a husband is to take it from a father"—cf. "half my love and care" etc. However, this is as far as Bradley goes with his account. He draws his few qualifying observations into the finally (perhaps intentionally evasive) vague notion of Cordelia's "tragic imperfection"(323) (among his discrete number of observations working towards this view, he also notes Cordelia's strangely unthoughtful way of addressing her sisters on parting from them: "language perfectly just, but little adapted to soften their hearts towards their father"). "Imperfection", however, hardly accounts very clearly for the strangely active, thoughtless form of non-participation Cordelia insists on in the opening scene, *or* its decisive role in finally generating the debacle, not to mention how she adds to the debacle on leaving her sisters. It is not here a matter of exonerating Cordelia or only pointing out some imperfection in her, but of boldly seeing that a certain form

[213] As for these heroines (notably Desdemona), Bradley goes on to remark that "[w]ithout loss of self-respect, and refusing even to appear to compete for a reward, they could have made the unreasonable old King feel that he was fondly loved." My point above exactly, bearing on how Lear only naturally expects Cordelia to come through (though without his being "the unreasonable old King", which is but another form of projection onto the scene).

of sublimated judgment which she is practising, which deflects from her own insecurities, and the extreme course Cordelia takes with it, *will* lead to tragic disaster. Such judgment, insisted on to such lengths, will necessarily draw one along with it into its own aggressive, even violent *un*-truth, and in this not only will leave nothing possible it will generate something far worse: energies from the abyss which, working overpoweringly through human desperation and hurtfulness will overtake everyone with their chaos.

Bradley himself, in spite of his unusually conscientious practice, could only take his analysis so far. The cult of devotion about Cordelia in his time continued to cast its restraining shadow over his promising investigations into the opening scene, investigations that were at least a little more thorough than had been the case, and would continue to be the case. I have spoken of a reigning taboo that has hung over the scene, in fact, for a very long time. Especially in our time this taboo seems to have morphed into doing some especially curious dream-work (as illustrated in the first paragraph of this essay). In procedural terms the main issue, governing all critical practice that would honour Cordelia in all things, has to do with reading back into the play's opening scene what is only really gathered about the character of Cordelia later in the play. This "essential" view of her was well stated by Bradley long ago (316-317):

> *Her assertion of truth and right, her allegiance to them, even the touch of severity that accompanies it, instead of compelling mere respect or admiration, become adorable in a nature so loving as Cordelia's. She is a thing enskyed and sainted, and yet we feel no incongruity in the love of the King of France for her…*

In her active behavior in the opening scene of this play, Cordelia comes across as far from "loving"; Bradley himself notes, what's more, that in this scene "Cordelia's speech actually perverts the truth", and indeed this could be said of her to a degree, as we have seen, beyond the import Bradley attaches to his words. Surely here, in her "assertion of the truth", and especially in the "severity" of it, Cordelia has misfired and lost control. However, a view of Cordelia that is derived from what we learn about her later in the play has displaced the understanding that another Cordelia manifests in this scene. Similarly, what France presents about Cordelia derives from a sphere of life that also lies beyond the opening scene as we have seen this acted out. He himself has been no witness to this scene and only categorically stands by his own view of it.

The critical question is how much of this "essential" Cordelia are we supposed to think comes through in this scene, or what is her "truth" here? for she is not here the sublimely reformed, available person she becomes later after all the harm is done. For the movement in this scene is towards peace for all beyond any moralizing question of character—a tremendous

reconciliatory peace—until Cordelia wilfully wrests the movement of the scene away from itself on the slightest pretext. As I have shown at some length, Cordelia wilfully and haphazardly seizes on what is only one superficial aspect of the scene gone wrong in Regan's testimony, to cry hypocrisy upon the whole affair—all this, in fact, as a pretext for escaping from her own insecurities and social inability at this kind of event. The very greatest harm will come from her subsequently insisting on her non-participation to the extreme point she does, tragically unaware of what she is doing by thus binding life-energies to "nothing. The action in this way turns into a most horrible lesson in the tragic dangers of non-participation where this is insisted on to the point of an ultimate position, without reprieve or any space left for a movement of life at all. Judgment taken to this extreme breeds chaos ("chaos is come again"), and out of this chaos, in which all will share the blame in time, will come in time an ultimate ruin for all, beyond reformation.

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# PART VI

# *The Bearing of a Tragic Humanism on Anthroposophic History: the Extreme Case of the Alexander the Great/Gilgamesh Identity, and the Life of Ita Wegman*

PART ONE

## A Contribution to Issues of Karmic Destiny with Specific Reference to Rudolf Steiner's Account: The Extreme Case of Alexander the Great[214]

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I
Breaking Down the Issues

*My Question*

My question, in this case, is a big one, and being big, it will have to be formulated in a somewhat long-winded manner.

How did that Individuality who once incarnated as the dramatically world-mighty Alexander the Great (356-323BC)—among other things himself so fully a pagan at this time—find itself at last re-appearing, over 2000 years later, in the very much less glorious, but no less historically significant Ita Wegman (1876-1943), the founder in our time, along with Rudolf Steiner, of anthroposophical medicine, and herself, along with him, an advanced worker on behalf of Christ?

How will this rather strangely extreme and seemingly *incommensurate* transformation from pagan to Christian, and world conqueror to humble doctor, have been accomplished,

[214] The present paper constitutes the first part of a two-part project that aims, more broadly, at addressing the issue of the gap between Karmic Destiny and the Historical Record. I give my rationale for entering into these elaborate matters in the concluding section of the second part, which begins on p.192.

considering the great range of conflicting experiences that are concerned, as I shall attempt to elucidate in some detail?

I put this question forward in the knowledge that some account of the process of this Individuality's evolution over this long period of time has been rendered—by Rudolf Steiner himself. However, my question is also intended to communicate bafflement over this near-inconceivable transformation from Alexander the Great to Ita Wegman, bafflement which only increases, the more one immerses in the actual historical details of Alexander's momentous life and personality, at once so much more noble and so much less noble than Wegman's life, as can be confirmed.

### *The Beginning of an Answer*

We hear from Steiner of a number of other incarnations of this Individuality, one in the life just before Alexander the Great, in the 5th century BC, where it appears as one Mysa (cf. Artemisia) who was initiated into the Mysteries at Ephesus. This same Individuality touches down again in the 9th century AD, as the historical Sigune of legendary Grail fame.[215] Beyond this time, no other incarnation is spoken of directly until this Individuality reappears, 1000 years later, as Ita Wegman.[216] Additionally, this Individuality has, rather dramatically, taken part in some major, grandiose events that have occurred in the spiritual world between death and rebirth. In the first of these, along with the Individuality that lies behind the historical figure of Aristotle, it is blessed with a very special view of Christ in His descent from the spiritual spheres at the time of His incarnation as Jesus, and in the light of this vision it vows, along with the Aristotle-Individuality, to devote itself to working on behalf of Christ in the future. The second event takes place some 1500 years or so later, in the time of the Renaissance, again in the spiritual world. Both Individualities take part, along with many other souls, in a great Supersensible School convened around the figure of the Archangel Michael who initiates all in the future goals and specific forms of cultural understanding that will from thereon in absorb them in a further, proper future Christianizing of the world. Nothing else is said by Steiner to have happened to these Individualities in the intervening period between this event, in the time

[215] In the meantime there would appear to have been one other incarnation, glanced at by Steiner as "a fleeting visit to the earth in the first Christian centuries in a district not without interest for the Anthroposophical Movement." Nothing further is said otherwise about this incarnation. See *Karmic Relationships* IV, https://rsarchive.org/Lectures/GA235/English/RSP1972/19240224p01.html

[216] There is some allusion by Steiner to another reincarnation between these two points—in the 13th century, as Reginald of Piperno, Thomas Aquinas's scribe and confessor, but such allusion offers next to no detail of relevance to the present study.

of the Renaissance, and the later again closely bound incarnations of these Individualities, in the early 20th century, as himself, Steiner, and as Ita Wegman.

More than extraordinary as these events in the spiritual world will appear to us to be, nevertheless this is all we have had to go on to explain, among other things, how the Alexander-Wegman Individuality will have transitioned from such an intensely pagan life as Alexander had known to a just as equally intensely Christian life such as Wegman knew. In the preceding account, *one* factor does begin to open up the large ground separating Alexander's pagan experience from the later Christian civilization to which the Individuality who is behind him commits. This factor bears on what was understood, or came to be understood, by both the Aristotle and the Alexander Individualities, to *be* that "further, proper future Christianizing of the world" which they committed to. As this was embodied specifically in the *anthroposophical* culture to which Steiner and Wegman were finally given, such "Christianizing" would take the form, in fact, of a new *synthesis*, what represents for each, a fulfilment, of both orthodox *and* heretical Christian streams. Steiner had shown[217] that Christianity in its pure essence, as the effect of Christ's deed on Earth, emerged not in opposition to, but as a fulfilment of, the pagan Mysteries of antiquity.

These Mysteries had been brought to a proper consummation on being transposed, through Christ's deed, from their secret places onto the world scene (having been brought also into a further, more complex, relation to the physical world of death.) The subsequent repression of these Mysteries by what became soon after the official Catholic Church represented, consequently, its separation from Christianity as the fulfilment of these Mysteries. The resultant conflict reaches a new point towards the end of Thomas Aquinas's life, when he undergoes a momentous transformation. He has a mystical experience in which it is revealed to him that all of his writings have been but "straw." What Aquinas realizes at this point, as Steiner explains it, is that the Catholic Church has gone wrong in separating itself from a fuller sense of the Christian Mysteries such as would be provided only if it could join further with a stream that had preserved the original link to those Mysteries, namely the stream of Grail Christianity. With *its* close association, going back historically, to the pagan Mysteries of antiquity, this stream emphasizes the full grandeur of the *cosmic* role that Christ *also* exercises in our lives, beyond His fulfilling us in our human sphere. A true fulfilment could only lead from the one sphere into the other. To put it in its baldest terms, the thinking power that Aquinas had so consummately achieved on behalf of a Catholic Christianity would now have to join with the deeper feeling-and-will power of a Grail Christianity that is more directly linked to Christ

[217] In *Christianity as Mystical Fact*, 1902.

inasmuch as it reaches out also to His power of *cosmic* revelation, beyond all that He has to reveal to us about ourselves.

Steiner would have known all this, because it is he who had been Aquinas in his former life. He had also been the Schionatulander of the historical Grail culture of the 9th century in the life before that; again before that, he had been Aristotle—to name the most significant (more recent) incarnations. (It is only from convenience, of course, that I have put matters in this way, since it is the one Individuality behind all of these who incarnates in each case.) Significantly, Steiner speaks of the official (orthodox) Christian stream into which he incarnates as Aquinas as "foreign" to him, for his essential link *is* to the Mystery-stream that goes back to pagan antiquity and that is being carried forward through the Christian centuries in the form of a number of so-called 'heretical' streams. His purpose in incarnating as Aquinas was to bring to bear on the whole body of Christian doctrine as this was being worked out in the official Catholic stream the supreme conceptual power he had come into as Aristotle. He does this in order to at once consummate this stream and to incorporate it in time into his own deeper Mystery-stream to which he properly belongs, for future purposes. That the two streams would have to synthesize for purposes of genuine human progress in the future is a point made in one of Steiner's Mystery Plays. It is the Spirit of Aquinas himself who must convey these purposes to one of his die-hard followers at this time, who is ready to join the persecution of the Knights Templar that is underway:

> *This Order, whose persecution you support,*
> *now feels impelled to undertake*
> *the deeds which serve this [future].*
> *And only when our brothers' aims*
> *unite for peaceful purposes*
> *with those the heretics pursue*
> *can good in earthly progress blossom forth.*

The supreme conceptual power brought to bear on the official Catholic stream of Christian experience as accomplished in the figure of Aquinas, inherited as this power was in him from his earlier incarnation as Aristotle, carries in itself the potential for consummating that Christian experience through this power's deeper links to the ongoing stream over this time of ancient Mystery-knowledge. For this is the kind of conceptual power Aristotle possessed; it too had its place in the cosmic Mystery-experience of antiquity, along with the feeling-and-will stream that in a now new relationship to Christ continued as a hidden stream through the Christian centuries. Aristotle had been in his time initiated into the Samothracian Mysteries, and in that experience there had re-awakened in him his still greater initiation in the

older Ephesian Mysteries that had taken place in his incarnation just before that, as the philosopher-initiate Cratylus. This unique depth of Mystery-experience touching on all three spheres, in a great unity of thinking, feeling, and willing, was re-kindled in our time as the specific ground on which Steiner's commitment to Christ is made in the context of the new anthroposophical culture, a commitment made all the richer and indeed complete by Steiner's having previously mastered and absorbed, as no one has since, the experience of official orthodox Christianity, as Aquinas.

One may read further of all this in the anthroposophical literature that is available on this subject.[218] My specific purpose in invoking this deep history here is to acknowledge that what might well have been a very difficult transition for Alexander from *his* form of pagan experience to the Christian one would certainly have been made easier by the prominence that is given to the ancient Mystery-stream across the Christian centuries, with which the Individuality behind Alexander is likewise linked, in association with the Individuality behind Aristotle. This link comes to a historical climax in the association of Ita Wegman with Rudolf Steiner in our time, the ground for this association being set in part through the earlier association of the two in the Grail Mystery-experience of the 9th century where Sigune and Schionatulander appear as a couple. Back in their own time Alexander and Aristotle are an especially famous association: Alexander, presumably as part of his education under his tutor, himself partook of the Samothracian Mysteries along with Aristotle, and with the latter, it appears, was likewise transported back through this experience to his previous initiation in the Ephesian Mysteries as a certain Mysa (Artemisia) alongside the famous philosopher, Cratylus. The depth of Alexander's Mystery-experience at the time of his association with Aristotle cannot be doubted. We have also heard that just beyond their lives Aristotle and Alexander find themselves once again in the spiritual world, where they are given over to their view of Christ descending momentously, out of the Heavens, into incarnation as Jesus who suffers death and by his death is resurrected to become the Christ Jesus Who remains present and now has His abode on the Earth. One aspect of the pagan Mystery-stream experience had entailed coming into Christ's presence in the Heavens, and it would appear that Aristotle and Alexander had had some such experience, but they had now to contend with the fact that Christ had transposed Himself to the Earth. To encounter and to have knowledge of Him here would now become the purpose of their subsequent incarnations. To meet up with Him in His presence on the Earth was now the new task. Then comes another incarnation, in the 9th century, in the already deeply

[218] Among other sources, Steiner's *Karmic Relationships*, and his *World History in the Light of Anthropos*ophy. See also, by Margarete and Erich Kirchner-Bockholt, *Rudolf Steiner's Mission and Ita Wegman*. For all of Steiner's titles cited in this paper, see https://rsarchive.org/Search.php

Christianized Mystery-stream of Grail culture. Aristotle will re-appear also as Aquinas in the 13th century, and Alexander as Reginald Piperno, Aquinas's personal secretary and confessor. Then follows at the time of the Renaissance the Supersensible School in which both Individualities find themselves now steeped in instruction about Christ in His further relation to the Mystery-knowledge that will be revived some 400 years and more later in the Anthroposophical Movement with Steiner leading the charge, and Ita Wegman at some point become his able fellow-worker.

### *The Question Returns*

All this will seem to us perhaps a natural and simple evolution from pagan to Christian for the Individuality who lies behind Aristotle, the Mystery-philosopher who continued to work as he always had in a quiet corner of the world back in Greece—but for the Individuality set free into the wide world to have his life there in any way that he would, as the world's wilful and unresisted conqueror, Alexander? he who would extend himself to the very limits of what his pagan life would allow and saw fit? for whom nothing would satisfy except his relentless venture to reach "the world's end," if this could be done, this virtually limitless extension in what was a decidedly worldly experience? How to reconcile this direction in worldly experience with the future lesson of Christ that His Kingdom was not, in the end, of this world? Aristotle, from what we know, will not have been morally responsible for anyone's death, but, among other things, Alexander *was* responsible, in significant cases in a terribly wilful way, for the deaths and for the miserable afterlives of thousands upon thousands, for example in the conquest of Thebes and of Persepolis. If we are to rely on the *anthroposophical* account of his further karma, as we have it, in spite of this record of his life as Alexander, his vision of Christ descending to the Earth would have been enough not only to turn his spirit entirely in the new direction, but to absolve him of his deeds, for nothing in his subsequent incarnations, according to the lives he would go on to lead, suggests any difficult expiation for them.[219] Sigune suffers in her own terms, but there is nothing in her story that implies that she is suffering to make up for terrible deeds of her own. Are we asked to assume that it is possible for a soul to make up for such a range of deeds strictly in the spiritual worlds in which it sojourns consequent to such a problematic incarnation? That Alexander's deeds were simply the way things transpired in his day (what else does one expect of war and conquest?) is unlikely to reconcile us to the idea of

[219] The thought will occur that perhaps his "fleeting" incarnation in the first Christian centuries mentioned above (n.215) would have achieved such an expiation. But an event of such momentous significance would surely have called forth some words about this from Steiner who says nothing, in fact, about this incarnation other than that it was "fleeting," a term that belies any idea of an action of such grave import as expiation on this scale would entail.

how karma would work in this case.[220] In the meantime, the extraordinary imbalance that is highlighted in the karmic dispensation that characterizes Alexander's case, when one considers, in the first place, the extent of wilful violence he also permitted himself, will make us wonder greatly just how karmic compensation works.

There is, apart from this, the problem of Alexander's immediate worldly direction as underscored by his fully pagan life lived out to its utmost reach. It is a problem that, in the end, takes us beyond, but also includes, his fanatical commitment to establishing more and more pagan temples, a commitment that intensifies, significantly, especially from the time he knew that he could not extend himself any further as a conqueror in the East and consequently turned his attention to the new task of conquering all of the rest of the West. Grecian civilization in its Mediterranean range would stand at the centre of the whole empire and is where these new "colossal" temples would be erected:

> *The king also intended to erect six colossal, and colossally expensive, temples—on the sacred isle of Delos, the birthplace of the god Apollo; at the world-famous oracle at Delphi; at the oracle at Dodona, second only to Delphi; dedicated to Zeus at Dium in Macedonia; to Artemis Tauropolos (Huntress of Bulls) at Amphipolis, a city in Thrace under Macedonian rule; and finally to Athena at Cyrnos in Macedonia, who was also to be honored with a shrine at Troy.*[221]

Within a mere 400 years of this mammoth project, which Alexander intended but because of his death could not see through, the Mystery-experience, as it had been known in the pagan world to that point, would be changing drastically, shifting with Christ to quite another sphere. With Christ's Death and Resurrection, Mystery-experience in the temples would have become, if not exactly obsolete, at last inadequate as a focus for coming to know and unite with Christ in His new life on Earth. What would have become, in the meantime, of Alexander's impulse to establish the range of temples in Greece more fully than had ever been the case, and of the level of commitment this project entailed, which in the depths of his evolving Individuality would now have to be renounced in favor of a Mystery-stream experience that had shifted its basis beyond what the temples could put one in touch with any longer? The question remains

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[220] Steiner for his part speaks appreciatively, and even admiringly, of the "stupendous forcefulness" with which Alexander "spread the impulses given by Aristotle over wide areas of the then known world," an action that turns out to have been crucial to the continuity of Mystery-tradition (see *Karmic Relationships*, VIII). Such a level of the justification of "forcefulness" can only leave one baffled and stupefied. A great deal more would have to be accounted for by way of such an explanation. See also by Steiner lecture 5 of *World History in the Light of Anthroposophy*, where Steiner conveys the same point of view with the same unqualified enthusiasm: "doing in a most wonderful way."

[221] Everitt, *Alexander the Great*, 368.

how this Individuality could have simply moved on to the newly established Christian dispensation, to assume its commitment now in this sphere?

As with Alexander's deeds of violence and the compensation for them one can only assume would be called for, so with his devotional pagan faith, which in the depths of his spirit he took to extremes, and the further renunciation of that faith that would be required of this Individuality in the new era: nothing in his subsequent incarnations, as accounted for in anthroposophical literature, suggests how this Individuality could have come to any resolution with itself in these terms. There is no sign in these incarnations that these issues have been faced. So, also, for the one limitless, all-embracing motive-force underlying all that would involve Alexander in his life, which can be identified as an unsurpassable form of *pothos*, an idea of "true" glory that translated as "the need to achieve the impossible," and that in him was "fathomless," being the motive-force behind his impulse to world-empire, or what may be more properly conceived as an impulse of complete world-extension.[222]

This *pothos* "to journey to the ends of the earth" was but a way of conceiving of the possibility of possession of the world in *all* of its physical and metaphysical grandeur. What has become of *this* gigantic motive-force in his subsequent incarnations—as if possession by such a force could have been simply left behind? We have what are only considerably more reduced and greatly displaced versions of this spirit of extension, first, in Sigune's impulse to learn the secrets of the starry-heavens, the "document" of which, as an occult script, she sends Schionatulander to find and to bring back to her (his quest for this "document" being the occasion, as it happens, of his death); then, in Ita Wegman's later development of anthroposophical medicine, such wide-ranging work having on its level its own form of complete extension, at least theoretically: to every aspect of illness and health, spiritual and physical. In both cases, we have what are yet far, far more circumscribed expressions of the impulsive spirit in question. We should have to look elsewhere to find evidence of a life into which the full extent of this Individuality's former engagement with the world will have been transposed, not to mention at last purged of its earlier pagan direction, while at the same time satisfying the turn to a new Christian form of extensive spirit…

[222] Quoted phrases from Everitt, 83, 120, 324.

## II
## The Issues Addressed

What I am doing here is raising issues of karmic adjustment for which there are no answers today, although these issues can be, theoretically, explored further through a form of what I will call "biographical reflection." We may suppose that an Individuality did not have, or cannot have had, a certain life, a life that will have been decidedly another's—as for instance anthroposophical literature will have established the matter for us—and yet that life may well have served this Individuality as a way of reconciling with issues of its own as it were by its *reflection* in it. At least, this is no less conceivable as a form of karmic adjustment than the thought that one can have been responsible, as in the case of Alexander, for violent actions on such a large scale, and yet be offered the possibility of complete expiation for this during one's sojourn in the spiritual world without one's having to make up for this in subsequent incarnations, as we seem to be asked to think was his case. To turn to the two more manageable issues that will concern us here: how will the Individuality who was Alexander have come to terms with

1) the need, as we enter the Christian era, to forever renounce his passionate devotional pagan faith, to which he had been committed to the point of conceiving at the height of his powers a colossal program of temple-building which would make of Greece the nominal centre of a new world-order, or, then again,

2) his unparalleled impulse to extend himself throughout the world as world-conqueror, itself but the expression of the same *pothos* which had him living into literally everything that could be brought forth by way of the glorious life?

How can what was finally such a complete pagan way of conceiving of life in the world, orchestrated as this was on a scale that has not been conceived of since, have been genuinely outgrown without this Individuality's having had the chance to lay all the energies on which this direction in life was founded to rest, or to find as it were a proper catharsis for them? In the meantime, a path into the Christian era had been offered to this Individuality in the form of the Mystery-stream that would transmute inwardly in Christ and find expression at some point in the Grail culture into which this Individuality incarnates some 1200 years later. This Mystery-stream of experience had not been the only level at which Alexander had immersed in all that pagan life and culture had had to offer to him in its own right in his time. There would have to have been much more by way of an adjustment in his case, on the basis of all he had experienced as Alexander, and on entering what would be a radically new era from the time of Christ's appearance in history…

## *The Issue of a Devotional Pagan Faith: Biographical Reflection in the Life of Julian the Apostate*

Applying oneself to the idea, proposed above, of karmic adjustment through "biographical reflection," one could see how the life of Julian the Apostate some 600 years later might well have helped to address the first of the two unresolved issues we have cited that one imagines would have continued to concern the Individuality who lies behind the incarnation of Alexander. This is the issue that has to do with Alexander's dramatically intense commitment to a devotional pagan faith, which we have postulated could not have been so easily renounced in favor of the new Christian faith that would now be developing. Deferring to the anthroposophical account, we cannot assume the Individuality in question to have reincarnated as Julian. Julian, Steiner tells us, reincarnates, another 600 years later, as the Herzeloyde of Grail culture, while we know that Alexander reincarnates as Sigune. Yet Sigune grows up, from an early age, in Herzeloyde's charge (in the company of Herzeloyde's son, Parzival—as does also, incidentally, Schionatulander.) That these Individualities should end up so closely connected in their Grail incarnation in itself points to a deep affinity between them. It appears that Julian saw himself as "a reincarnation of Alexander"[223]. This may have simply been Julian's way of saying that they were associated in spirit as undefeated warriors and supremely effective rulers (which both of them were), but Julian's strong words might well lead us to wonder about some deeper karmic link between the two (not, of course, consciously intended by him).

Their common purpose was to extend themselves without limits, among other ways, in their devotional pagan faith. In this sphere Julian even saw himself as trumping Alexander, whom he paints as someone who had not been devoted enough: "Who, I ask, ever found salvation through the conquests of Alexander? What city was ever more wisely governed because of them, what individual improved?"[224] It is a measure of the extent of Julian's commitment to the faith, now that he was Emperor and it was in his power to restore a pagan faith that was very much in decline with the great new wave of Christian forms of devotional practice taking over. Until the ascendancy of Julian, for 50 years the Empire had been officially spearheading the new faith. Julian was to see for himself what he was up against when he passed through Antioch, on his way to subdue (as Alexander had before him) the Persians in the East. While there, he had a rough treatment from the Christians who knew of his intention to restore the pagan faith throughout the empire. Julian's intense participation in the pagan Mystery cults that survived are well-known: he had been initiated into one cult after another, and he now saw

[223] Stoneman, *Alexander the Great*, 30.
[224] Murdoch, *The Last Pagan*, 159.

how brokenly these cults had carried on in these Christian parts. One imagines the soul of Alexander looking down on Julian's proclaimed crusade and seeing in this the faith he himself had intensely identified with taking its full measure against the new evolutionary force it was up against. In this crusade, he would be re-living what there was of his own links to that faith that remained and coming to terms with what it meant to be giving all this up at last. From his point of view and from Julian's, this would have to be a *tragic* experience: a tragic experience through which he would *yet* find catharsis and release. For Julian's crusade would, with his sudden mysteriously strange death, come to an abrupt end, as if by a dispensation of fate intended to see the world through at last beyond paganism in religion into the new era.

The circumstances of Julian's sudden end have become the stuff of legend. Julian and his army were in retreat from the Persian territory they had penetrated, after the wise decision was taken not to attack the fortified town of Ctesiphon, near Babylon, for fear of trapping themselves within. The army could not have waited there any longer to do further battle, on account of the threat of malaria from the flooded area all around. The version by one Ammanius, a devoted soldier in the army, written many years later, would seem to have been the most reliable account of what followed. They were headed north to the closest Roman territory, and Julian at the front of the army had gone ahead without his armour, to reconnoitre. Suddenly the news reached him that the army was being attacked from the rear, and without stopping to put on armour (in some accounts he is said to have forgotten to do so in his concern) raced to the rear to shore up and to unite his ranks. Another attack from the enemy was now made at the front of the ranks, and a third on the side, while Julian galloped back now here now there, once again to unite and marshal his ranks. The Roman army eventually took control of the situation, and were now routing the enemy, when Julian sped on after them shouting and waving his arms by way of punctuating their success in this skirmish, when out of nowhere (this is how the moment is described in every account that was subsequently given), a soldier on horseback rode up to Julian thrusting his spear into his unprotected side.

The assailant would never be actually identified, which gave rise to many versions of who he may have been, but the symbolism of the moment, mimicking as it did the thrust of the spear into Jesus's side at the Cross, opened up one version in particular. Steiner, for his part, makes it clear that the blow was a dispensation of fate, and that it had to be because Julian's pagan crusade could not be. Steiner's sympathies are, still, with Julian: he makes the point that the devotional pagan crusade on which he was bent, to the extent that it opened up again a route to the ancient stream of Mystery-knowledge, *could* have served to bring a fuller cosmic perspective to bear on the events of Christ's coming, and so a more valid interpretation and experience of those events, than what was being offered in the official Christian stream that was

fast gaining ground with the populations. It *could* have served in this way, theoretically-speaking, but it does not follow that it would have. Among other things, there was no suggestion in Julian's intention to shore up the pagan faith of any idea of relating the practice of this faith further to the forms of Christian faith that at this point were fast developing in their own right. It was one form of orthodoxy being set over against another, with Julian bent on slowly rendering the other obsolete with his. And this should make us see all the more clearly on what basis Steiner was saying that Julian's crusade could not be: the time was yet far from ripe for a proper mingling of the two spheres.[225] That possibility could not come fully, in fact, until the Anthroposophical Movement itself emerged as its own phenomenon is far along as the late 19th century! In the meantime, Steiner wished to redress the balance of sympathies, for Julian had always been given short shrift in the Christian culture that would insist on making a lesson of his hopeless perversity. Thus he would come to be forever known as Julian the Apostate, the one who had turned his back on Christianity as it was developing in his time even as the Empire's by then official religion (the Emperor Constantine had made it so some 50 years earlier, and so it remained under his successor Constantinus, until Julian was enthroned.) To redress the balance of sympathies was to put us in mind that there had been far more to pagan religious tradition than what the later orthodox Christian culture would for many centuries make of it, and that it would behove us to look back upon that tradition with a more proper depth of understanding of its role in our evolution.

Still, the Christian stream of evolution had prevailed. The Alexander-Individuality, looking down on this scene from its place in the spiritual world, would have perceived the inevitability of these events, and that the shift to Christ, in the present form the dissemination of His name would take, would have to be made, however tragic that shift would have been as an experience for the Alexander-soul or the Julian-soul. There had been no accommodation of this Christ in Julian's religion, and an insistently orthodox pagan affiliation would no longer do. That point had been even graphically made in the sensational form Julian's death had taken. Legend, if not the actual facts in this case, would consolidate the point, inasmuch as it was said that, as Julian lay on the ground, mortally wounded, with the spear still in his side (for he could not wrench it away himself)—he is even pictured in this moment "filling his hand with the blood

[225] See *Building Stones for an Understanding of the Mystery of Golgotha*, Lecture VII: "That he was doomed to fail was a necessity of the time … It was not possible in his time … to reconcile the old principle of initiation with the real essence of Christianity … Julian only came in contact with a very exoteric form of Christianity…" On this level, Julian was simply battling one orthodoxy with another, and as it turned out, his crusade would have to be "a blind alley," for "the current trends … were a necessity." In connection with a proper mingling of the two spheres of Mystery-initiation and Christianity, Steiner adds that only "today" has this "become possible."

that was dripping at his side"[226]—he spoke the famous words: "Thou hast won, O Galilean!"[227] Tragically both souls, Julian's as well as Alexander's, will have been finally cut off at this moment from what had been their purely pagan affiliation in religion. Yet it was an end that brought catharsis through an inevitable renunciation of the pagan faith, and both souls were now set free to commit to Christ. They would do so after their own fashion, retreating, in a manner of speaking, away from official mainstream Christianity, for which they were not destined. Rather they take their places in the Mystery-stream experience of old that, evolving further out of its ancient pagan origins had, secretly over the first Christian centuries, in a new way absorbed the fresh event of Christ's appearance. Their former pagan faith finally renounced, Christ could now be freely embraced, and this was to be in the context of the ongoing Mystery-stream experience of Christian Grail culture in which they appear in close association, as we have seen, as Herzeloyde and Sigune.[228]

I have been proceeding speculatively with my proposed method of biographical reflection; it has been a way of taking the measure of the balance of forces that are concerned in any Individuality's evolution on the karmic plane. Close links between two lives will be of some necessity in elaborating this method, and no doubt the method can be abused, but it

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[226] Murdoch, 190.

[227] We have noted that Julian had indeed been initiated in the Mystery-cults, and Steiner relates this experience directly to his death: "The truth is that [his murder] took place because [Julian] was regarded as a betrayer of the Mysteries." See *Karmic Relationships IV*, Lecture V, 1924. Julian had gone too far in speaking openly of the Mystery-teaching of the Threefold Sun. At the same time (in the lecture cited in n.225) Steiner remarks that the murder was "the work of an adherent of Constantine." He explains that Constantine turned to advancing the Christian religion because he was unable, as former emperors had been, to force his way into the Mysteries: "to compensate for this he therefore did everything in his power to advance the cause of exoteric Christianity in the Empire." In the meantime, among "Constantine's adherents … scarcely a vestige of understanding" for the Mysteries "remained." From this rather confusing account, the murder of Julian by "an adherent of Constantine" will look to us like an act of jealousy aimed at Julian's boastful boldness in speaking so openly of the Mysteries. It is also possible, however, that an authorized representative of the Mysteries might have engaged such "an adherent of Constantine" to perform the deed. One way or another, the blow dealt to Julian would have played directly into the image of the spearing of Christ's side. A dispensation of fate indeed! when one pictures Julian making himself suddenly so vulnerable in battle in such an impulsively irregular way, which would have been unheard of. It was a tragically pathetic end to an otherwise illustrious life.

[228] That Julian should find himself in this later life so deeply immersed in the Christian stream will not seem so strange if one takes into account what Steiner also reveals about him (it is the deeper substratum to his remarks about a possible "mingling of spheres" quoted in n.225) that "it should have been his [Julian's] very mission to prepare the right way for Christianity," *Karmic Relationships IV*, Lecture V, 1924. "We find in the foundations of his soul the true impulse to take hold of Christianity. ("Julian felt intuitively that Christ could only be found in the Mysteries," from Lecture VIII of *Building Stones*.) But he did not let it emerge, he suppressed it, misled by the stupidities which Celsus had written about Jesus." As noted above: "Julian only came in contact with a very exoteric form of Christianity."

remains, for all this, a significant basis for relevant lines of inquiry. The links between Julian and Alexander go beyond a simple case of fabrication or wishful thinking. They may even have been from soul to soul. Why especially should Julian have had Alexander in mind on penetrating into Asia, and not some earlier Roman emperors, or his immediate predecessor, Constantinus, who had only just been there when the revolt supporting Julian took shape, and whose almost exact route into Asia he was tracing? For three quarters of the way between Constantinople and Babylon, Julian was marching through what was already Roman territory, and would not have to give battle. Certainly he had had the same complete success in battle up to then, like Alexander, and indeed would remain undefeated even when in retreat from Cstephion; he had had an equally perfect success in government also, with the one exception of the rebellious Christian population of Antioch to which I return below. His pagan scheme, in which he saw himself as trumping Alexander, was going forward. In the meantime, one cannot emphasize enough the wide range of congruent detail in the two lives, which go beyond coincidence. In his military campaign Julian would only go as far as Babylon where Alexander died, as if he had had to have some karmic meeting with him there, and Julian dies himself not far from there. Because of the nature of the environment in those areas, Julian would be embalmed with the very same spices that Alexander had been, and in time he would have an epitaph that quoted what had been Alexander's own favorite lines from Homer. This epitaph was not conceived by Julian but very likely by his successor, Jovian: "He was a good king and a mighty warrior," this last phrase sometimes translated as "a mighty spearman" (the irony would be too blatant in this case). At the same time, somewhat fittingly in our greater picture of the karmic events that involved Julian, he would be buried in Tarsus, the native town of St. Paul, he who had virtually created the community at Antioch on one of his first missions as a Christian evangelizer. It was the Christian population of Antioch who had given Julian such a hard time in his pagan crusade, and the thought in some quarters had been that the cavalryman who had brought him down had been from that population.

### *The Other Main Issue*

Around 600 years after Julian's time, both he and Alexander would reincarnate together in the historical Grail stream, and another 600 years or so after that, Alexander would be in the Supersensible School, along with Aristotle, reincarnating in turn towards the end of the 19th century into the Anthroposophical Movement inaugurated by Rudolf Steiner. This line of development from the 9th century was entirely in the so-called heretical Christian Mystery-stream, although there had been at least for one other, intermediate incarnation in the official Catholic Christian stream, a highly crucial one, as we have seen, for Aristotle, as Aquinas

(Alexander re-appears then as Piperno, Aquinas's confessor). Ita Wegman would play a major role in the Anthroposophical Movement from the time Steiner fell terminally ill; she had become his doctor, and together over a good year and a half they had developed the basis for a comprehensive anthroposophical medicine that became Wegman's special project and crusade for many more years. Seven years beyond Steiner's death, she undertook her first journey abroad with the express purpose of visiting the Mystery sites with which she and Aristotle had been connected in former lives, notably the sites at Samothrace, Ephesus, and Eleusis, about which she had in previous years published letters and given lectures. Two and half years later, she journeyed abroad again, this time going through Constantinople, thence down to Palestine, consciously retracing the route Alexander had taken through those parts. We are returned with this picture of her journeys to the other main issue connected with the stream of her destiny. The Mystery-life had become the terms of her destiny from the time of her previous incarnation as Sigune in the Grail stream. The transition to Christ had been fully made from that time onwards. But what of that grandiose and glorious world-energy that could not stop at anything, identical with a concept of reaching "the world's end," which she had embodied as Alexander, what had been, in fact, an overwhelmingly *pagan* direction *into* the world, making of experience in the *world* everything that could be desired and gloried in?

To come back to my description above: here is the issue raised by a personality "set free into the wide world to have his life there in any way that he would, as the world's wilful and unresisted conqueror, the world-renowned Alexander the Great? he who would extend himself to the very limits of what his pagan life would allow and saw fit? for whom nothing would satisfy except his relentless venture to reach "the world's end," if this could be done, this virtually limitless extension in what was a worldly experience?" How could Ita Wegman have reconciled this overwhelming direction in worldly experience from her past, with the future lesson she had in the meantime absorbed that the Kingdom that Christ served was not, in the last analysis, of this world? How could the Individuality who lies behind Ita Wegman have come to terms with all that had in the meantime accrued in her destiny by way of a pagan impulse in the form of the world-dream of limitless extension in power and glory that had been her object in her incarnation as Alexander? Somewhere along the line, this Individuality would have had to come to terms with this huge outlying issue, and in one's attempt to discover how this might have happened, one is led to the idea, since none of her known incarnations addresses the issue, that this may well have been by way of biographical reflection, again in the life of one who through the terms of that life would have embodied a pattern of reconciliation to that issue, who would have expressed a level of relationship of pagan to Christian that would at last have settled the issue by establishing the Christian future through some form of finalcatharsis of the pagan

energies. One looks about and asks oneself what personality in the intervening time, between the life of Sigune and that of Wegman, could possibly have sustained such an extreme level of energy and intensity, and done so in a way that would have served such a catharsis.

### *The Issue of a Limitless Pagan World-Energy: Biographical Reflection in the Life of Michelangelo*

And thus one is led to consider the life of Michelangelo as a biographical reflection of the issue concerned. No other modern personality would seem to fill the bill. His life takes place about half-way between the life of Sigune and that of Wegman, again roughly 600 years after the one and before the other (thus 600 years seems to be around the time between one life and the next through the whole sequence of lives we have traced, from Alexander through Julian, to Sigune, Michelangelo, and Wegman.) One could begin with the more explicit congruent details. There is the fact that Michelangelo laid out the square before Rome's Capitol building in the design of Alexander's shield.[229] More dramatically, when looking through the mountains of Carrara for marble for Pope Julius's tomb, he had had a vision of carving a Collosus out of the whole of a mountain face, "a madness," he said, "that came over me, but if I could have been sure of living four times longer, I would have taken it on."[230] This puts us in mind of the suggestion that it is said was once made to Alexander that as a lasting memorial to himself Mount Athos might be carved out to represent him in "colossal" fashion, a suggestion Alexander in fact resisted, though over the centuries the story proliferated and by Michelangelo's time had become well-known. The link back to this story is likely to have been on his mind. When conceiving of his project for the San Lorenzo façade, his imagination was "staggered" by "the possibility of obtaining marble 'to make giants.'"[231] There was also the *superbia* of his conceiving as many as 40 sculptural figures for Julius's tomb. In fact, in all arts, "he assumed he was capable of anything,"[232] his life, consequently, being marked by a "simultaneous commitment to an impossible number of commissions."[233] Here again, on its own level, was a life lived, as Alexander's life had been lived, at its utmost reach, a testimony, if unconsciously, to the Alexandrian *pothos*, and in which also much hardship was suffered and even sought, as had been the case with Alexander. Michelangelo speaks of his gargantuan exertions in the case of his monumental work on the Sistine Chapel roof: "I have borne every kind of humiliation, suffered

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[229] Boardman, 9
[230] William Wallace, *Michelangelo*, 74
[231] Wallace, 116.
[232] Wallace, 82.
[233] Wallace, 71.

every kind of hardship, worn myself to the bone with every kind of labour"[234]; faced with such an "enormous task," he found himself too often "wearied by stupendous labours."[235]

The Alexander *pothos* has been described as a need "to achieve the impossible," his capacity for which, it is said, was "fathomless," and it remained unrivalled over centuries; until, that is, we reach the life of Michelangelo in whom we find the same unbounded drive and level of energy, the same impulse to achieve what would have seemed to be impossible, *transposed now to the artistic sphere*. In at least one instance Michelangelo thought that he had indeed made "the impossible possible," to use his own words. This was in the case of the early Pietà, one of the earliest of his great works, brought forth when he was only 25, and which today stands in Rome. Making "the "impossible possible" may well have been what a Mystery-act was all about, and this Pietà could well have served as a Mystery-image, one fully immersed in the Christian vision. It is as if a power had come through Michelangelo in the creation of this work that had come from a former life in a Christian Mystery-stream. When Rudolf Steiner stood before this image in Rome, he describes how he was, in an after-effect of his experience, brought back in spiritual vision to the moment when as Schionatulander he himself lay in Sigune's arms. In this experience he recognized for the first time that it was he who had incarnated as Schionatulander. How extraordinary that Michelangelo should be the one to lead Steiner back there and to give him that knowledge. It suggests, of course, that Michelangelo is likely to have been himself connected with the Grail stream, and may even have had in some form a close association with Alexander who was Sigune. In one way or another the association with Alexander is there. All this could only be an unconscious experience for Michelangelo, and we note that, in fact, after the Pietà his life-work takes a very different direction. Something had broken through with the Pietà that would not find expression again until the last period of Michelangelo's life, when, very old by then, he would return to the Pietà-motif more than once.

His artistic direction after the Pietà betrays what is, in fact, the predominantly pagan nature of the drive at work in him, even while the form and content of his work presuppose a Christian setting. One is caught up principally in the overwhelming grandeur of this work which bears all the marks of a limitless *pothos*. One is struck, indeed, by what is, in the last analysis, the emphatically *worldly* direction of this work's energy, which is especially marked by its "exaggerated physicality,"[236] taken, everywhere, to extreme limits. This realization comes upon us most especially when Michelangelo suddenly shifts his focus to a new "spiritual yearning" that contrasts with it, in his creation of the figures of Rachel and Leah, to go alongside the

[234] Wallace, 94.
[235] Wallace, 101.
[236] This and the following three quotes, from Wallace, 197.

monumental Moses for Julius's tomb. The fine, "ethereal" quality of these figures contrasts dramatically with the "fearsome aspect" of the Moses, that *terribilità* in whom is found in so much else of Michelangelo's work. One thinks immediately of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*, which comes across almost like a declaration of war, but there is no less of this quality of *terribilità* in the many figures that overwhelm us from the Sistine Chapel roof (all of whom, incidentally, are Old Testament.) There are also the gigantic figures of Night and Day, Dusk and Dawn, also designated for the Medici Chapel, all of which have something epically ominous about them, not to mention Michelangelo's famous Captive figures forever caught mercilessly in their stone, figures additionally intended for Julius's tomb, some of which remained unfinished. In the greater part of his work between the early Pietà and his late period, Michelangelo was immersed in a world which he seems to have had, indeed, a need to work out of himself, if we take a measure of it, that is, from the point of view of his earliest and his last periods. The Florentine Pietà, on which he began work in his late 60's, and which was otherwise intended to mark his grave, was, after the David, his largest and most ambitious sculpture—defying the near-impossibility of carving four figures out of a single block of marble (nor was he finally able to pull off the feat)—the grandeur, the *pothos* thus persisting, yet all this is now transmuting, this work dramatically marking Michelangelo's return to the more contained and circumscribed, if no less intense, Christian Mystery-stream. In this work, which focuses on Christ's Deposition, or it may be The Descent from the Cross, Michelangelo has sculpted himself in place of the supporting figure, who has been taken to be either Nicodemus or Joseph of Arimathea. Either way, it is the Grail Mystery-stream that comes to expression again here.[237] In his late years Michelangelo undertakes a series of personal drawings of the Crucifixion that also reveal him in a transformed light. This most stupendous of artists who, as the modern-day epitome of *pothos*, was for so long given up to the creation of his gigantic figures, now sees it perfectly fit to be approaching Christ merely through "a caressing mark of chalk on paper."[238] And his later poetry supports his new transformed understanding. Speaking directly to Christ, he formally acknowledges that

> *… by you alone the soul is stripped and clad,*
> *purified with your precious blood, made whole,*
> *purged of all human urges, sins untold…*

[237] It is, of course, Joseph of Arimathea who carries the Grail-stream forward into the Christian era. According to the anthroposophical understanding, he re-appears in the historical Grail culture of the 9th century as Trevrizent, while Nicodemus returns as Amfortas.
[238] Wallace, 322-323.

*…my life and love, my ways, my fate.*[239]

It is hardly as if we were meant to turn our backs forever on Michelangelo's previous stupendous artistic achievements. One supposes that he would not have wished that himself, though in the very depths of his soul this could conceivably have been the case: it cannot be ruled out with complete certainty. The language of his late poetry communicates a condemnation of his worldly "ways"—they are his "sins"—and this reflects the conventional setting of his Catholic faith; it is likely that by these terms he meant his temperamental failings, which, like his work, could express themselves in a huge way. What *we* are meant to see, all the same, is that Michelangelo's achievements were in modern times the most complete, and would seem to have been intended, by the powers that be, as *the last* expression of a worldly pagan *pothos*—pointing to the purpose of an epochal renunciation that is already implicit in the fact that here the *pothos* has been displaced to an artistic level. We stand in wonder at the limitless extent of this expression in pagan spirit, but humankind is at the same time at last being purged of it, given over, as it now must be, to a new expression of our cosmic and human evolution. I have been imagining the Individuality behind the Alexander-soul looking down on the life of Michelangelo and seeing in it, precisely, the possibility of living through, as it were vicariously, a renunciation of that former engagement in a worldly *pothos* that had been so fully the expression of its life as Alexander. Through such a renunciation, which could only be achieved through a fully worthy catharsis of the energies involved, such as only a life such as Michelangelo's made possible, this Individuality frees itself—at last fully—for its work in the Christian Mystery-stream to which it has already committed. Living this renunciation out through a biographical reflection of itself in the life of another thus becomes an option for such a soul in need. Certainly we know of no later incarnations of this soul *of its own* that would lead us to believe that such a karmic adjustment was made.

As it is, it is the deep tragedy of Western civilization that the pagan *pothos* continued to express itself beyond Michelangelo in forms that committed its agents outwardly to war, exactly as Alexander's life had done. Such was the case, a hundred years beyond Michelangelo's death, with Louis XIV, who in the early 1660's commissioned a whole series of grandiose paintings from Charles le Brun that highlight Alexander's life and achievements, intended with reference to the aspirations to greatness of the French King. "Grandeur could not resist the idea"[240]: Louis XIV saw himself as the new Alexander of his time. It is said that for him a time of peace was only ever a way of preparing again for war. Yet, ironically some 10 years before, in 1655,

[239] Michelangelo, *Poems and Letters*, 67, 65.
[240] Boardman, 9.

Christian Rosenkreutz, himself a leading figure in the ongoing hidden Christian Mystery-stream, had had himself painted by Rembrandt as "The Man in Armour" who is taken to represent Alexander. In this painting he is fully armed, but the idea here clearly is that the battle is one that must now be fought not without but within, in the dark depths of menacing impulses that continue in the soul. In the meantime, yet another issue raises its head here, for, from a certain point of view, Alexander had been largely responsible for propagating this imperial idea, founded as it was in a practice of war, that was to continue to take the West over. And so one finds oneself wondering further: to what extent did the effect Alexander have on this plane play into the bitter disputes Ita Wegman found herself caught up in, in the period that led up to her exclusion from the Anthroposophical Society in 1935?

For the imperial pretensions (by this point in history so gravely morbid) of Nazi Germany were the immediate background of these disputes, which pitted Wegman against the Society in *its* readiness to seek accommodation with that regime as a way of survival. The conflict took an intensely personal form between Ita Wegman and Marie Steiner, and one wonders might the fierceness of their opposition have had something to do with the unusual strength with which Wegman assumed her own position in this matter, knowing, as she did by then, of her leading role in the Anthroposophical Society as the reincarnated Alexander? *a strength become at this time perhaps obsessive?* Not that there could be any compromise with the Nazi regime, of course, but that in a less heated form of discussion, Wegman ought to have won the Society over to the only position that could be justified. 'A strength become obsessive' for the reason that Alexander had not come across over time in exactly the best light, as Marie Steiner's remarks about him at a board meeting, at which Wegman was present—that he was "*also* ingloriously known"—would have brought home. How to justify herself in relation to her past must also have figured in the way Wegman comported herself in her conflict with Marie Steiner, and it is easy to imagine a certain alienating brazenness emerging in Wegman to override the ambiguity in her karma about which she must have been left in some confusion. Wegman fell very seriously ill during this conflict. It is said that she had had a direct meeting with Christ and Rudolf Steiner "at the threshold" of consciousness, and one wonders would there have been some communication at this meeting, a reminder perhaps, about her share of karmic responsibility for the morbid imperial developments of that time? [241] Having recovered from

[241] Such an inversion of position in the Steiner Spirit (from the seemingly unqualified support for Alexander's campaigns spoken of in n.220) is not inconceivable. Steiner himself testifies to this possibility in his Mystery Play, *The Soul's Probation*. There the Spirit of Benedictus appears with reference to its recent life as Aquinas (i.e., formerly Steiner) to convey to his chief supporter that the cause they have served (in opposition to the Knights Templar) must now be reversed. See above pp.4-5. Of course, the modern historian, Ernst Badian's extreme view that "there is little to choose between Alexander and Hitler" deserves to be denounced but

her illness, soon Wegman is undertaking travels that would take her through Constantinople right down to Palestine, covering what had been part of Alexander's own tracks. Might this journey have been taken to seek some form of reconciliation with herself on yet a third level, related in this case, to the ongoing problematic impact of Alexander's share in the imperial life from which Western culture continued to suffer badly and which was about to be repeated in her own time? She makes it clear that she journeyed to Palestine desperate to find traces of Christ, and the whole time she was there was asking the same obsessive question:

"Where can I find traces of Christ?"

"Where is there anything to remind one of this Mystery of Golgotha?"

"Where could one experience anything of the greatest of all events?"[242]

But to no avail:

"it was as though the heat obliterated every trace of remembrance."

She was visiting Palestine in the fall during the hot season; she had been unable to visit in the spring, on account of the lingering effects of her illness.

Sojourning by the Sea of Galilee, she adds:

"I found nothing as a stimulus to rebuild in my imagination the scenes of Christ's life."[243]

The only scene from that life that came to strong consciousness in her during her entire stay in Palestine was the scene of "the overthrow of the merchants and barterers by Christ Jesus in the temple."[244] All this will strike us as correlating in a sadly fitting and uncanny way with the spiritual wasteland the Society was making of itself at this time, in which traces of "Christ's working" likewise could not be found.

Within months of her return from these travels, Ita Wegman was formally excluded from the Society by its Executive. This was in the spring of 1935. In March of that year, the German Air force, the Luftwaffe, was officially created, and the disarmament clauses of the Treaty of Versailles formally renounced. Conscription had been re-introduced…

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nevertheless throws a disturbing light on Alexander's own imperial drive and its concomitant influence. There is no question of Alexander's disposition at some point to "bouts of murderous rage" and "ruthlessness" that will have affected thousands of souls. See *The Greek Alexander Romance*, translated with an Introduction by Richard Stoneman, Penguin, 1991, 2.

[242] Ita Wegman, *The Mysteries*, 128-130.

[243] Wegman, 136.

[244] Wegman, 132.

During the War that followed, from 1940-1943, Ita Wegman lived in the small town of Ascona in neutral Switzerland, where she quietly continued her studies "not only in the Mysteries but in Christology in particular."[245]

She died on a return journey to Arlesheim in 1943.

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## One Further Consideration

Another way in which the Alexander-soul could have found support in making the transition from the pagan world into the Christian is through the vast material that appeared on Alexander and his life especially in the later medieval Christian centuries, most notably in the context of the long-running genre of the Alexander Romance. For a convenient, composite sampling of this material, see *The Greek Alexander Romance*, cited above in n.26. More and more over the centuries, this material takes on a decidedly "Christian colouring" (*The Greek Alexander Romance*, 21). Especially in later centuries—right through the time of the Crusades and, indeed, well into the early Renaissance—one can speak of a natural assimilation of Alexander and his accomplishments into the mainstream of Christian culture. A sculptured relief that hangs on a wall in St. Mark's Cathedral in Venice is a striking instance of this assimilation. It had been a popular iconographic theme already in the medieval period: Alexander is depicted seated in a chariot and lifting above the earth with the help of griffins who have acquired the power to raise themselves skyward by reaching out for the meat that is held over their mouths just beyond them. A strikingly pagan representation that yet strongly evokes Christ in the power of His resurrection.

[245] Wegman, 6.

For more on Alexander's afterlife through the Christian centuries, see also *A History of Alexander the Great in World Culture*, ed. Richard Stoneman, Cambridge University Press, 2022), especially the chapters, "Christianizing Alexander Traditions in Late Antiquity," by Christian Thrue Djurslev, and "Alexander the Great and the Crusades" by Mark Cruse. This latter essay, reaching well beyond the theme of the Crusades, is nothing less than a summary of all of the major contributions to the Alexander Romance in the later period that extends into the Renaissance. As John Boardman puts it, in *Alexander the Great: From His Death to the Present Day*, 42, "the man was on everyone's mind." One could re-think my speculative question: would this widespread assimilation of Alexander into Christian culture in later centuries have served to help his soul's transition from pagan to Christian, or might the Alexander-soul have been by then itself influencing these developments?

PART TWO

## Alexander the Great, and the Gilgamesh Story[246]

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It is of some significance that the very first material of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* should have been identified only in 1872, fifteen years after the initial archaeological findings were made,

[246] The following is presented as the second part of this two-part study whose first part appeared originally as "A Contribution to Studies in Karmic Adjustment, with Specific Reference to the Anthroposophic Account: The Extreme Case of Alexander the Great."

and that the first translation of part of this first material (into English) should have appeared in 1876, the very year of the birth of Ita Wegman, she who in anthroposophical circles is well-known to have formerly incarnated as Alexander the Great *and* Gilgamesh. There are lines from the First Tablet of the *Epic* that might be describing the achievements of both of these former personages[247]:

> *Opening passages in the mountains,*
> *Digging wells at the highlands' verge,*
> *Traversing the ocean, the vast sea, to the sun's rising,*
> *Exploring the furthest reaches of the earth …*

The line that immediately follows, however, raises an issue, for the theme it evokes does not bear on the life of Alexander in anything close to the full literal sense in which it does the life of Gilgamesh:

> *Exploring the furthest reaches of the earth,*
> *Seeking everywhere for eternal life…*

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*Immortality and Worldly Power*

From the development of the story as we have it in the *Epic*, it is clear that for Gilgamesh, "exploring the furthest reaches of the earth" and "seeking everywhere for eternal life" are *identical* actions. This was not the case with Alexander, for whom "exploring the furthest reaches of the earth" was an action to a great extent pursued in relation to material ends and that took the form of a worldly extension in spirit inevitable in a later period of time (hundreds of years later) when human beings were far more fully incarnated in the physical world. Hence my focus, in the Part One of the present chapter, on a disposition to "worldliness" in Alexander that could only, over the longer term, become a karmic issue for the Individuality that had incarnated in him. A measure of the problem Alexander raises in this connection is the rather extreme view taken of him by a prominent researcher of the Alexander legacy:

> *There is no good reason to think that the real Alexander sought immortality rather than unlimited power…* (Boardman, 73)

There are, in fact, several indications in Alexander's life that his concerns did reach out to the idea of being immortal, at least by virtue of his birth from a divinity. On visiting the temple to Zeus-Ammon in Egypt, on account of the way he was addressed there, the idea came

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[247] All quotations from the Norton edition of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, 2001, translated by Benjamin R. Foster.

to his mind "that he was indeed the son of Zeus," and his senior Macedonians were (for political reasons) much concerned that he seemed in the meantime to have rejected paternity by his natural father, Philip. The question is posed by a leading historian of Alexander's life: "How literally did the king … take all this?" It would seem that "with passage of time, Alexander became increasingly serious when he claimed his divinity." His stupendous success and general achievements as the unresisted conqueror of the world naturally supported an idea of his "godhead," and "he let it be known … that the Greek city-states should establish his cult." He already had a habit, off the battlefield, of dressing formally in the symbols of Zeus-Ammon, among other gods. Naturally perhaps for a historian, the conclusion is drawn that all this was "less for religious than for political reasons"; "it is more likely that he had no personal belief in his divinity, but saw political advantage in the establishment of a ruler-cult devoted to him." Thus our historian concludes:

*His godhead was a memorable symbol which would express and promote his overwhelming power.*[248]

*No* personal belief in his divinity? This must, surely, be doubted. And yet the overwhelming evidence, at least historically and to all appearances, is that Alexander comported himself with obsessive attention to the power he had momentously accrued, and might have continued to accrue (had he not died suddenly, at the age of 33), as world emperor. What has been described as Alexander's governing motivation behind his impulse to conquer the world—a characteristic *pothos*, or "need to achieve the impossible,"[249]—all this was inevitably steeped in worldly ends, which puts any suggestion of a further concern with immortality (other than in the sense of exceptional lasting fame) at some remove from his life as a questing warlord. I have pointed to what was Alexander's undoubtedly deep (pagan) worldliness as opening up a significant problematic issue in the karmic development of the Individuality who incarnated in his guise. *And yet necessarily* somewhere in himself Alexander will have borne the burden if not the fruit of his preoccupation with immortality when he was Gilgamesh. Nothing of that can have disappeared from the make-up of this Individuality. The question remains, then, at what level, and how and in what sense, Alexander can be said to have continued to carry in himself that impulse to seek immortality (in the literal sense that would undo death) that had clearly defined him when he was Gilgamesh. Where had this impulse gone to, or where was it keeping, and was it the case that it had, in the meantime, been lost sight of? But first, it devolves on us to establish the sense in which Gilgamesh can be said to have sought immortality; on the basis of what impulse? and to what point had that impulse led him? Finally,

[248] See, for the many quotes in this last paragraph, EVERITT, 186-188; 299-30; 363-366.
[249] See Part One of this chapter.

what would he have gained by what became for him, at a certain point, the *only* thing that concerned him in his case, as the *Epic* would have us see him?

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### *Anomalies: The Story in "The Epic of Gilgamesh," and Rudolf Steiner's Clairvoyant Account*

In a way that counterpoints the anomalies we have brought out in our approach to the story of Alexander[250], we find, in the case of Gilgamesh, again significant discrepancies between levels in the presentation of his story. In Alexander's case, as we saw, we have a considerably developed external history of the life and his achievements, one that significantly complicates our relationship to Rudolf Steiner's clairvoyant account of Alexander's karmic purposes. In Gilgamesh's case, contrastingly, it is only from Steiner's clairvoyant research that we have any notion of what actually took place historically, and this account corresponds only very roughly with what the *Epic* presents, so that we are left with two very different sources on which to base an understanding of what karmic experience is concerned in Gilgamesh's case. This divergence becomes especially clear when we focus on the main situation that the *Epic* narrates: the initiation-experience that for Gilgamesh and Enkidu begins with their victory over the "forest monster," Humbaba, allowing them access to "the supreme dwelling of the gods." There they take possession of a "lofty cedar" at the forest's heart that "once pierced the sky," whose power these heroes have made themselves worthy to appropriate, apparently to serve human life on earth for what is the first time. Hence its dedication, in its artistically transformed state as a "door" that "only a god" can "go through," to Enlil, the god of the earth, who until now has been inimical to the human race.

A further aggressive, even arrogant, new rejection of the love-goddess, Ishtar, follows from this exploit. Her advances (as if to win his cause over to hers) are rejected by Gilgamesh, and crying out to the gods for revenge for this outrage, Ishtar succeeds in persuading them to unleash "the Bull of Heaven" upon the land, with an effect that is equivalent to an epidemic. The heroes are thus faced with the second task of defeating the Bull, which they do in almost the same way Humbaba is vanquished, thus repulsing the judgment that had been pronounced against them. At the height of their victory over Ishtar, Enkidu arrogantly allows himself a further, superfluously violent expression of disgust of her:

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[250] In Part One of this chapter.

*He tore off the bull's haunch and flung it at her:*

*'If I could vanquish you, I'd turn you to this,*
*I'd drape the guts beside you!'*

Perhaps this detail is deemed necessary by the author of the *Epic* to justify what follows, for now Enkidu, who has been Gilgamesh's indispensable right-hand man, is appointed by the gods to die to compensate for their actions. We have no trouble seeing that what they have done is reject a certain advanced form and level of sexual life, designed for spiritual ends, that was a normal, even a religious practice of that time, as performed by Ishtar's appointed "cult women, prostitutes, harlots." These help her in her protest to the gods. The epidemic subsequently inflicted on the land takes the form of some mass sexual/spiritual disfunction among the men. A "pit" opens up, and hundreds of young men "fall" into it.

But the rejection by the heroes of the sexual practice of the time follows from the power they have acquired over themselves in their victory over Humbaba; having come into this power, they no longer require the inspirations of such a sexual practice. The gods deem that in their exploits these heroes have gone too far for the times, in spite of all the good they have brought to the people over whom they rule as a result of Enkidu's sudden emergence alongside Gilgamesh, which the gods themselves had specially designed. Enkidu's death is now decreed. He responds to this tragic fate with great bitterness, feeling he has been cheated of his young life. At first, Gilgamesh responds unthinkingly to the discovery that Enkidu will die, accepting it fatalistically, according to the social-psychological tendencies of the time. These have until then always accommodated death by means of the most extravagant rituals of bereavement, and the rituals Gilgamesh performs upon Enkidu's death are indeed overwhelmingly grand and impressive. These are highlighted in the *Epic* in much grandeur. But the dire import of Enkidu's death soon comes home to Gilgamesh who is suddenly filled with horror of the material dissolution that will also await him, not to mention grief over his permanent separation from his friend, as they have known each other. Enkidu abides now in a miserably dark underworld that in its whole make-up embodies the dusty ends to which the human body is delivered, the final condition of fate that in those times was understood to await all human beings, even those who ended up presiding in the underworld as judges. Gilgamesh has, as it were, woken up to the finality of death, and from this experience the resolve is taken to discover how one might make oneself immortal.

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Steiner's account of these events, drawing on his clairvoyant perception of the actual "historical events behind" the "myth," as he puts it, presents us with a good number of significant variations.[251] He delivered his first comments on the Gilgamesh story within a year of the publication of the first translation of the *Epic* into German, by Arthur Ungnad in 1911. He was to deliver more comments on this story some 10 years after that. In the account he conveys in the later comments, Steiner explains that (quite apart from any initiation process such as the *Epic* highlights) Gilgamesh and Eabani/Enkidu were *constitutionally* "unable to approach the Mysteries of their own land,"[252] and that it is this *fundamental* incomprehension, which he experiences in his own way, that lies behind Gilgamesh's confrontation with Ishtar.[253] Gilgamesh sees "contradictions" in the Mysteries dedicated to her, which Steiner explains had to do with their eclectic nature: thus, one form of the Mysteries might be observed in one period of time and another form in another period. In this history, it is the priests of the Mysteries (not Ishtar) who, in their anxiety, appeal to the gods for help, because of the great influence that as their ruler Gilgamesh, along with Eabani/Enkidu, exercises over the people of that land. The spiritual powers that govern human evolution (i.e., the gods) heed their protest, and inflict punishment on the land: "Troubles of all kinds befell the inhabitants, physical illnesses and more especially diseases and psychic disturbances." "The consequence," Steiner adds forthwith, "[is] that … Eabani … dies; but … Eabani remain[s] with this personality spiritually, even after death," and it is from this "Spirit of Eabani"[254] that Gilgamesh "receives intuitions and enlightenment," not least about "the problem of immortality" which now "begins to play a strong part in his life."

Thence follows Gilgamesh's "journey," which takes him historically to Burgenland, in what is today eastern Austria. There, in a "colony"[255] of the Western Hibernian Mysteries, Gilgamesh has the experience that is centred in what the *Epic* presents as the meeting with Utnapishtim. As in the *Epic*, Gilgamesh fails at this initiation; nevertheless, he comes away from his experience, according to Steiner, generally "enlightened" about the question of "immortality." In any case, beyond this failure, he continues in touch with the Spirit of Eabani, with the help of whose inspirations he is still in the position to proceed to ordering the life of the land in conformity with an experience of the world that will bring into being a new,

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[251] For my descriptions of Steiner's account, which follow, I draw on his *Occult History*, 1912, Lectures 1 and 2, and *World History in the Light of Anthroposophy*, 1923-1924, Lecture 3. **For all of Steiner's titles cited in this chapter**, see https://rsarchive.org/Search.php

[252] This and the following many quotations from *World History*.

[253] "He has no essential understanding of the essential nature of the Goddess." From Lecture 1 of *Occult History*.

[254] This is how Steiner presents it in *Occult History*.

[255] See Lecture 4 of *World History*.

veritable "connection of the human soul with the divine-spiritual worlds."[256] In the meantime, Gilgamesh is no closer to being able to approach the Mysteries of the Goddess in his own land. These remain inaccessible to him, for it is in his very constitution, psychically-speaking, to be "unable" to approach them. His own spirituality is of a significantly different kind, and will find expression in external culture more in his overarching influence as leader of his people, in contrast with the more inward incursions of Mystery-influence into that culture that will continue to percolate through, but through the efforts of only a select few who would have been fully initiated into those Mysteries.[257]

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### *Gilgamesh's Suffering and the Evolutionary Design: "The Epic" and Steiner: Tragic Humanism and 'Transcendentalism'*

Not that Steiner is not aware of Gilgamesh's suffering in these far-reaching and highly elaborate developments. In *World History*, he refers in passing to "the question of immortality that was the occasion of such suffering and conflict to Gilgamesh." In *Occult History* he had also glanced at this suffering. Thus, on the subject of Gilgamesh's sudden awakening to his mortality, Steiner notes that "a thought to which he [Gilgamesh] had previously paid no heed comes before his soul in all its terror"/"gnaws at the very fibres of his soul." However, it is characteristic of Steiner's approach to Gilgamesh's story that in *World History* the reference to Gilgamesh's suffering is made in passing, that is to say in the form of a relative clause: "The question of immortality that was the occasion of such suffering and conflict to Gilgamesh was connected in those days with a necessary vision into the evolution of the Earth in primeval times." As for his comments in *Occult History*, on this occasion, Steiner was not giving his own thoughts but rather summarizing for his auditors (many of whom would not have come upon the new translation of it as yet) how the *Epic* itself presents Gilgamesh's story. Steiner's own thoughts, when he gets on with them, to all intent and purposes, bypass Gilgamesh's suffering, his own purpose being to bring out rather the deeper ongoing evolutionary design that lies behind this suffering that is greater than Gilgamesh himself. This design overshadows the suffering. The shift in

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[256] A phrase from Lecture 1 of *Occult History*.

[257] See Lecture 2 of *Occult History* for these last distinctions. Gilgamesh's difference stems from his being more incarnated in the physical nature than others were at this time, and so disposed to something more like a rational judgment of "inconsistencies," while Eabani/Enkidu for his part possesses his own level of clairvoyance oriented towards more "ancient" modes of "cosmic" perception and experience that are not the forms of his time. See, in the case of their cultural separateness, Steiner's accounts in both *Occult History* and *World History*.

Steiner's account from Gilgamesh's focus on the dead Eabani to the Spirit of Eabani who appears to him is part and parcel of his approach. Gilgamesh's thoughts about mortality do not arise from himself but are rather suggested to him by this Spirit. Steiner's commentary is indeed throughout geared towards what may be described as a "transcendental" purpose in this sense. Among other things, it constitutes a shift in focus away from the impact the *Epic* makes as a representation of tragic experience. For the overwhelming impact the *Epic* has on everyone who comes across it has undoubtedly to do primarily with the searing depth and intensity of Gilgamesh's suffering when it comes to his horror of our mortality and his unabating grief over final separation from his friend. His is a human tragedy in the deepest sense.

Our text captures this tremendous emotional complex in Gilgamesh with the wonderfully capacious word "woe." This "woe" is nothing less than the one overwhelming driving force behind the whole of Gilgamesh's later initiation which, as we have noted, takes the form of a journey "across the sea" to find the one known immortal, Utnapishtim. Steiner is quick to establish that this journey is, indeed, "nothing else than the inner path towards initiation."[258] Historically, as he sees it, this is the journey to Burgenland where Gilgamesh has his meeting with a priest of the Hibernian Mysteries, a Hierarchical Being, who might be initiating him. In the end Gilgamesh fails to show himself suitably able, though he comes away from this encounter, as we have indicated, "enlightened" from the experience. This outcome conforms roughly to how the action resolves itself in the *Epic*. Otherwise Steiner's attention to the *Epic* is limited to the "scorpions" who appear to Gilgamesh guarding the entrance to the "tunnel" through which he must pass to reach the "sea" beyond which Utnapishtim lies. At this point, Steiner explains: "the spirit leads him into the realm of death," as a consequence of which "he enters the kingdom of Xisuthros [i.e.,Utnapishtim]." Steiner's focus, in any case, does not finally lie with this encounter: Gilgamesh returns from it, in fact, with very little gained, since he at last squanders even what enlightenment he has received in a later episode of anger (that concerns problems at home). This is the actual historical development behind the "snake's" thieving action in the *Epic* (it steals away with "the flower of rejuvenation" that Utnapishtim has gifted him with as compensation for failing the main test.)

Steiner's intended focus in these lectures is finally rather on what Gilgamesh and Eabani/Enkidu *already* embody in themselves of faculties that open up their own spiritual experience to them, both before and after Gilgamesh's abortive experience abroad. It is on the basis of these *constitutional* faculties that for a time both proceed to influence the spiritual life of the Babylonian people over whom they rule, with an effect that will carry over in a direct stream

[258] This quotation and what follows from *Occult History*, Lecture 2.

into the Mystery-experience of later times. It is also on the basis of these inbred faculties that an insight into the meaning of "immortality" is won, as alluded to above: "The question of immortality … was connected in those days with a necessary vision into the evolution of the Earth in primeval times." Neither Eabani/Enkidu nor Gilgamesh attain to the power of such vision, but they are, nevertheless, said in their constitutions to be "kin" to those former "primeval times" in which such vision was a matter of course.[259]

What such vision and their kinship to it represented was the certain experience that as souls we existed in former, purely spiritual conditions of the Earth in the midst of which we could already see the conditions we were to inherit later. This was proof that we do not die but in fact live on from one incarnation into the next, emerging onto the earth out of the cosmos, and, in time, back again. To experience this was, in the terms of that former vision, to be left with at least some form of direct after-knowledge of the interconnection of cosmos and earth, a form of certain experience that would seep through into one's whole life. Thus it was the "ancient holy secrets" that were "proclaimed" when one experienced this form of "connection of the human soul with the divine-spiritual worlds," and this achievement of Gilgamesh and of Eabani (who was now inspiring Gilgamesh from the spiritual world) is what percolates at last down to Alexander the Great, as far along as his own time some 2400 years later! At the end of this very long process, which he mediates in his own way and as befits the time, "Alexander the Great stands there as the shadow-image of Gilgamish … as a projection of the spiritual onto the physical plane … transformed into the laws of the physical plane … the man who is all personality!"[260] We shall come back to Alexander and his experience in his time below.

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Contrasting with what may be described as Steiner's 'transcendentally' expansive account of Gilgamesh's story, the *Epic* makes virtually everything of his journey in search of Utnapishtim, and especially of the all-concerning "woe" that drives Gilgamesh on this journey, which is never finally resolved. What Gilgamesh is said to have accomplished after this journey, as the Prologue indicates, is made possible not by his "constitution" but specifically from what "knowledge" he *has* acquired from the initiation he undergoes in this, the *Epic*'s second part. He returns from his ordeal with the "enlightenment" that comes from tragic experience—the "hardship" that is much emphasized in the Prologue. In the spirit of *its* "tragic humanism," which may be set over and against Steiner's "transcendentalism," in this second part the *Epic* focuses entirely on what Gilgamesh has accomplished for himself, without Eabani's help.

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[259] Here *World History*, Lecture 3.
[260] See *Occult History*, Lecture 1.

The tragic drama is, at the same time, of one piece. The later initiation develops out of the one that takes place earlier that begins with the encounter with Humbaba and continues with the confrontation with Ishtar *that follows from it*. We have already indicated what victory over Humbaba is about. Through the achievement of these heroes, humanity is offered a new possibility of moral self-determination. It marks the point at which Gilgamesh and Enkidu, in advance of the time, attain to an independent power over themselves in their moral nature; and the consequence of this is that they no longer depend on the spiritual direction provided through the controlled sexual practices of the time. It is the Sun-god himself, Shamash, who instigates the enterprise against Humbaba. We have noted, however, in both heroes the expression in arrogance or *hubris* that accompanies success in their exploit, in the way Ishtar is rejected. Gilgamesh and Eabani have evolved beyond the moral standards of the time, but they have also overreached themselves, and must consequently be stopped in their course.

This is typical tragic drama of the kind that we find in the later Greek period. In the meantime, a whole other evolutionary picture is given in the *Epic* than the one Steiner accounts for: the old Mysteries involving sexuality have been superseded. Contrast in this respect Steiner's emphasis, which scrupulously maintains the standing of the Mysteries in the face of Gilgamesh's "incomprehension." Steiner speaks of the "contradictions" with which Gilgamesh mistakenly confronts the Mysteries of the time. In the *Epic*'s tragic drama, if there is a contradiction, it lies in the one that has given Eabani to Gilgamesh only to take his friend away from him. Gilgamesh's tragic revolt continues in the way he assumes his grief over the death of Enkidu. A second part to Gilgamesh's initiation-experience in this story is thereby inaugurated. Gilgamesh's full story, as given in this *Epic*, is thus all of a piece. Over and against this, the first part of this initiation-process, involving Humbaba, is nowhere addressed by Steiner. Strangely enough, Steiner does not get very much at all into the details of the initiation-process that in the *Epic* are elaborated with great sophistication. There is an admiring reference to the role of the scorpions, but otherwise Steiner's focus is entirely on the final details of the process: the trial of seven days and nights, the loaves (which, oddly, in Steiner's account, assume the function of the rejuvenating plant in the *Epic*), and, of course, the devouring snake. His main purpose is to establish that Gilgamesh fails his initiation pretty well entirely, but at least Steiner acknowledges this much validity to the process as depicted in the *Epic*.

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## *The Bearing of Gilgamesh's Suffering in The Epic's Initiation-Process*

The *Epic*'s main author, Sin-leqe-unninni, was associating Gilgamesh with the initiation-process he accounts for some one thousand or more years beyond this legendary figure's life. This raises the question: how much in what our author presents represented a veritable tradition associated with Gilgamesh, and to what extent might this actually *have been* Gilgamesh's story somewhere beneath the overarching evolutionary account Steiner gives? To what extent, that is, was Gilgamesh's experience *actually* a tragic experience, as the *Epic* suggests? Or is the *Epic*'s tragic humanism the outgrowth of a later period of time, woken up to its own sense of the tragic which it is projecting onto the Gilgamesh story? One way or the other, we can hardly think that the initiation-process, as narrated in the *Epic*, is anything but an authentic experience well-known to the author by his time. The *Epic*'s account of that process conforms with our understanding of the initiation-process even today, as Steiner himself has outlined it, even if it necessarily takes a more ancient form befitting that far-back epoch in human history.[261]

The most extraordinary aspect to this initiation-process, however, is surely what drives Gilgamesh in it, namely all that is captured in his comprehensive "woe," a ponderous, hardly managed complex of grief, terror and horror. There is grief over final separation from his friend Enkidu which he cannot accept, terror of extinction or the separation from himself, horror at the prospect of our material dissolution in death. We are returned time and again to this driving force in the course of this initiation.[262] There is a great deal of angry violence in this drive:

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[261] One notes of the initiation-process in the Epic especially the richness of the imagistic detail, expressive of the peculiar mythical-psychological experience of the world as known in those former days, as for example where, at his meeting with Humbaba Gilgamesh dreams beforehand of mountains that fall on him, the lion-headed bird who descends on him, or subsequently the wild bull. Even so, we can still identify in his encounter with Humbaba that stage of the initiation-process delineated by Steiner as the Imagination-sphere (in which a final temperance or balance is achieved, by getting the better of the Guardian or darker Shadow in oneself), in Gilgamesh's later emergence from the "tunnel," which momentarily eliminates all "light" of experience, as the process one must undergo in the Inspiration-sphere (engendering further proof of one's power of spiritual growth or evolution), and the still further final journey across the "sea" as one's dramatic entrance into the Intuition-sphere where the most far-reaching secrets of our cosmic evolution are (one by one) at last revealed.

[262] Gilgamesh powerfully summarizes this fundamental experience in a set-speech given verbatim three times, first on meeting Siduri, the "hostess" who dwells at the edge of the sea, then Ur-Shanabi, the boatman who is forced to take him over the sea, and finally Utnapishtim when Gilgamesh will have at last successfully negotiated the sea-crossing (for the 'sea' symbol, see previous note):

> *My cheeks would not be emaciated. Nor my face cast down*
> *Nor my heart wretched. Nor my features wasted,*
> *Nor would there be woe in my vitals…*
> *But for Enkidu, my friend…*

*I will strike down your door, I will shatter your doorbolt…*
*I want to know…*
*Let them close behind me the doors of woe…*

It is the angry cry of the humanist ready to defy all the obstacles that might be put in his way in the course of the initiation-process; for him there is only the one overwhelming problem of death. And the initiation-process cannot answer this problem; Utnapishtim, into whose presence Gilgamesh at last finds his way, cannot answer this problem:

*Why, O Gilgamesh, did you prolong woe…*
*You strive ceaselessly, what do you gain?*
*… you wear out your strength in ceaseless striving…*

Gilgamesh had already been alerted to this outcome along his way, by Siduri (the 'hostess' whom he meets at the edge of the 'sea'):

*Gilgamesh, wherefore do you wander?*
*The eternal life you are seeking you shall not find.*
*When the gods created mankind,*
*They established death for mankind,*
*And withheld eternal life for themselves.*

At last, Utnapishtim can only repeat this same fact:

*The supreme gods, the great gods…*
*……ordaining destinies,*
*They established death…*

*No one dead has ever greeted a human in this world…*

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*My friend whom I so loved, who went with me through every hardship…*
*The fate of mankind has overtaken him.*
*Six days and seven nights I wept for him,*
*I would not give him up for burial,*
*Until a worm fell out of his nose.*
*I was frightened…*
*I have grown afraid of death…*
*How can I be silent? How can I hold my peace?*
*My friend whom I loved is turned into clay,*
*Enkidu, my friend, whom I loved, is turned into clay!*
*Shall I too not lie down like him,*
*And never get up forever and ever?*

In the meantime, Utnapishtim has at least appeared to Gilgamesh, but he cuts a figure that is anything but heroic. Ironically, he is presented as a flaccid, nerveless soul:

*As I look upon you, Utnapishtim,*
*Your limbs are not different, you are just as I am…*
*Yet your heart is drained of battle spirit,*
*You lie flat on your back, your arm idle,*
*You, then, how did you join the ranks of the gods and find*
*eternal life?*

The answer to this question is—by chance, gratuitously, and escaping the gods' design!

As a consolation-prize for Gilgamesh for his heroic endeavors, Utnapishtim offers to reveal to him "a secret matter/And a mystery of the gods" never before revealed. His long account of the Flood that destroyed all humankind except for himself and for his family then follows. In fact, he was not meant to survive, and did so only by a ruse of one of the sympathizing gods (originally Ea—the god of wisdom and magic, but latterly in tradition Shamash himself, the Sun-God). Sin-leqe-unninni, our *Epic*'s author, would appear to have been the first to introduce the Flood story into the Gilgamesh materials that survived; it is not clear whether this story was already known to tradition. But, in any case, one will ask: what is the point of this recounting in the context of Gilgamesh's concerns? The Flood-storm only highlights the more the uncontrolled destructiveness of the gods, their confirmed and essential antipathy to humankind. Utnapishtim saw the effects of their will as no one else did, and fell to weeping over them:

*I gazed upon the face of the storm…*

*Falling to my knees, I sat down weeping…*

By chance one man comes out of it immortal—whom Steiner reveals was in any case already one of the Hierarchical Beings, that is one of the gods. In some earlier Sumerian material on Gilgamesh, it is decreed that no one else will ever be made immortal again[263] … And Utnapishtim now puts the lame question to Gilgamesh:

*Now then, who will convene the gods for your sake*
*That you may find the eternal life you seek?*

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[263] See our text, p.145.

## *The Historical Reach of Tragic Humanism: Gilgamesh and Alexander*

We know what happens beyond this end-point of *non sequitur* action: Gilgamesh's heroic consciousness fails him, and he loses virtually everything he had gained by way of it, which in any case turns out to be nothing that has offered any resolution of his own concerns. Gilgamesh returns disconsolately to his homeland with Ur-Shanabi, the boatman whom Utnapishtim has banished forever from his shores for bringing Gilgamesh over the sea to him. Gilgamesh at this point boasts to Ur-Shanabi of his achievements: the walls of Uruk and the dwelling of Ishtar, achievements which have been described at length in the Prologue. From hearing about them at this point, we gather that these were *already* Gilgamesh's achievements before the initiation-story we have now traversed. Very likely these were Gilgamesh's achievements before the entire story that concerns Gilgamesh with Enkidu. We recall Gilgamesh's rejection of Ishtar and the impact it has had on his tragedy; it is more than unlikely that, after that experience, he would have returned to the *status quo* with her. The description of these particular achievements in the *Epic*'s ending repeats the words of the Prologue *verbatim*. The effect is complex since the Prologue gives us the *Epic* author's own words (i.e., it is he who is speaking), words which Gilgamesh now speaks himself. Spoken by Gilgamesh in the context of his final failure, these words come across now as bitterly ironic. The author is allowing the personage whose tragic story he has presented to subvert his own prefatory eulogy, which had served as a typical introduction to a hero's story. Great as the walls of Uruk and the temple to Ishtar would have been as achievements, and they were, in spite of the irony in the *Epic*'s ending, it is said in the Prologue that Gilgamesh has also brought back "tidings from before the Flood," and, in *this* context, he has made himself into a "restorer of holy places that the deluge had destroyed," thus undoing what the gods once brought about. Restoration of those holy places is a measure of how far, it could be argued, the *Epic* takes its tragic humanism. This Epic is *for* man against the gods, but it is so tragically; it is not that man has wanted to be only his own creature.

It would appear that our *Epic* author was mediating, in his transmission of the surviving material on Gilgamesh, and with his own incomparable touch, a stream of tragic humanism that was up to a point already in motion by the time he undertakes his own version of the story. Certainly, the theme of the protest over death was already well in circulation by then. The question is how far back into the tradition on Gilgamesh does this tragic humanism go, and would this picture of his story have even corresponded to the events as known by Gilgamesh in his own time? Steiner himself acknowledges Gilgamesh's suffering from the consciousness of his mortality, this from his suddenly living more deeply in his physical nature than had ever

been the case up to that point.[264] This new evolutionary experience was what made his life unique, and it becomes the whole basis of his journey to "find" immortality. Steiner's account does not open Gilgamesh's life to tragic experience in the way the *Epic* does, but it does not follow that this dimension to the life was secondary, or that it would not have been more intensely problematic than Steiner's account suggests (and as, very likely, he would have known himself, if such was the case). To the extent that it was, it would have informed the karmic life Alexander would have inherited in some part of himself at least. In any event, the sense of life as tragedy and the tragic humanism that developed from this would at a certain point take over a good part of the scene that the Greeks inherited, and among other things we hear of Alexander's love of the tragedies that he regularly put on for himself and his troops on his journey through the world, of these and especially Homer's *Iliad*, the work that has been seen as originating tragic literature in the West, and which Alexander kept with him at all times. He especially identified himself with Achilles, the semi-divine and finally tragic warrior-hero of Homer's *Iliad*.

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*Tragedy in the Life of Alexander*

We can also cite the gigantically unrestrained form Alexander's grief took over the death of his beloved Hephaestion, which one is almost bound to see as echoing Gilgamesh's grief over the death of Enkidu, in addition to echoing Achilles:

> *Alexander's grief was total, inconsolable, and uncontrollable … In imitation of the Greek warrior* [Achilles, who mourns the death of his beloved Patroclus]*, Alexander sheered off his hair above his dead lover … He spent a night and a day lying on Hephaestion's body, weeping, until his Companions dragged him off. He took no food and did not attend to any of his bodily needs …*

There was more to come:

> *Plutarch writes:*
>
> *"As a token of his mourning, he … demolished the battlements of all the neighboring cities, crucified the luckless physician and forbade the playing of flutes or any other kind of music for a long time …"*

[264] *See World History*, Lecture 3: "Gilgamesh was one of those who began no longer to say "I" to the spiritual and psychic part of their nature, in which they felt the presence of the gods, but rather to say "I" to that which was earthly and etheric in them."

*A local temple of Asclepios, the god of healing, was destroyed as his punishment for not having saved Hephaestion …*

*… a vast funeral pyre was to be constructed … The elaborate design was to take the form of a ziggurat with gigantic sculptural displays on each floor … eagles with outstretched wings and serpents at their feet; a wild-animal hunt; golden centaurs at war* [among many other spectacles] … *At the top of the monument would stand statues of Sirens, hollowed out to allow singers to chant laments …*[265]

*Alexander was disempowered by his grief for some time … He launched a winter campaign against the Cossaei, a warlike tribe that inhabited the highlands between Susa and Media; they made a living from brigandage … He massacred the entire male population from teenagers upward … it echoed the incident in the* Iliad *when a vengeful Achilles slaughtered twelve young Trojans and cremated them alongside Patroclus on his pyre …*

*He ordered the construction of hero shrines to Hephaestion in the Nile Della city of Alexandria and on the island of Pharos …*

It is as if the whole of Gilgamesh's tragedy had come crashing in on Alexander, beyond even what tragic humanism could support, for if, in his grief, Alexander *begins* in some form of tragic humanism, it is clear that this eventually develops in a more despairing and terrible direction, one that even many tragedies could not have countenanced. In this sudden shift in Alexander's life to the problem of death and tragic loss of his own, Alexander does not stop to spare anyone or anything that can serve his grief. It is a power he possesses as world emperor, and he uses it. It is not any thought of seeking immortality that Alexander is conceiving here. At the time of the sudden death of Hephaestion, Alexander had only just given up the idea of invading India and so extending his empire to that still farther point, and he was on his somewhat dispirited way back to Babylon. Hephaestion died in the summer of 324 B.C. Less than one year later, in 323 B.C., Alexander would be coming to terms with his own death.

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[265] Cf. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*:

*Gilgamesh sent out a proclamation to the land:*
*'Hear ye, blacksmith, lapidary, metalworker, goldsmith, jeweler!*
*Make an image of my friend*
*Such as no one ever made of his friend!*
*I will lay you down in the ultimate resting-place,*
*In a perfect resting-place I will surely lay you down.'*

## *Karmic Destiny in the Life of Alexander and in the Life of Ita Wegman: Outstanding Issues*

One does not doubt (and I, for one, do not doubt) the complete authenticity of Steiner's account of Gilgamesh's life or Alexander's in respect of the more expansive, far-reaching karmic purpose that is being seen through in them. As two expressions of the one Individuality who lies behind them, they mediate a karmic stream of historically crucial significance, one that will bear great fruit especially in the later Christian centuries (along the way, as the Grail stream). We have considered this whole phenomenon above.[266] Gilgamesh and Enkidu (Ita Wegman and Rudolf Steiner) will see their unconscious mediation of Mystery-experience fulfilled in their later incarnation together in Ephesus, as Artemisia and Cratylus, in the form now of a fully conscious penetration of how cosmos and earth are indissolubly linked in their own lives.[267] Still later, in Alexander and his teacher Aristotle, this direct "knowledge of the heavens," as implanted in earthly life, will transform further into "a mood of knowledge,"[268] and as such will serve as the living basis for a development in spiritual-scientific thinking, the first instance of such in human history, and the prototype of what will become anthroposophical science in our own time. In our earlier study we summarized this as a distinction between a cosmic experience centred in the powers of feeling and will, as a form of direct vision, and one that has developed still further, or additionally, into a thinking experience. In this thinking, earthly forms of knowledge of the cosmic are still being experienced as cosmic perception, a perception of the cosmos as reflected in the earthly. And it is this form and level of thinking perception that it is said Alexander was disseminating by taking Aristotle's scientific writings everywhere throughout the world he was conquering. This is said by Steiner to have been the whole "purpose" of his campaigns,[269] and the level at which he was disseminating a knowledge of "immortality" in the terms described above.[270]

Let us grant all this. *And yet* there will have been many other dimensions to Alexander's story, as there had quite likely been other dimensions to Gilgamesh's story. Nor does it follow from what Steiner is recounting that he himself would not have been aware of all the rest that

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[266] In Part One of this chapter.

[267] "The two personalities …were reincarnated as adherents of the Mystery of Ephesus … Thereby their souls were in a manner consolidated. Through the Mystery, they now received as earthly wisdom what had formerly been accessible to them only in experience, for the most part unconscious experience." *World History* Lecture 3.

[268] See *Mystery Centres*, 1923, Lecture 12.

[269] See *Mystery Centres*, Lecture 10, and *World History*, Lecture 5.

[270] See pp.193-194.

concerned these personalities who were after all working through all the nitty-gritty detail of historical and biographical circumstance such as we all have to deal with.

Clearly, Steiner had his own history to trace for the crucial purposes he had set himself of elaborating what no one else would have been in the position to see, and which take us into other crucial karmic spheres than those we would have been able to identify for ourselves. Alexander had his special and unique karmic purpose, which he was seeing through on its level. Good, but much else was also happening in the rest of his life. Among other things, as we have seen, something of a very different import is coming through as Alexander's karma with the death of Hephaestion, which reads almost as a repetition of his tragic experience as Gilgamesh at the death of Enkidu. From one point of view, one could say that this death is actually very badly managed when measured not only against the ethical ideals of tragic humanism but also, and perhaps especially, with respect to Alexander's greater, ideal karmic purposes as Steiner outlines these. Alexander's slaughtering of the whole Cossaeii male population in order to serve his grief over Hephaestion's death is a graphically grandiose indication of the freedom he reserved to kill whomever he pleased and for whatever purpose he deemed necessary or that buttressed his ends. We have pointed out Alexander's deep attachment to Homer's *Iliad*, and to the figure of Achilles especially. One leading historian in our day has put it this way:

> *It could be argued that Homer was his evil genius. The* Iliad*, masterpiece though it be, gave cover for his bellicosity and for the long bloodbath of his career.*[271]

One can see the deep problems of karmic adjustment for Alexander's later lives that such a career would pose, but one can hardly conceive of a way of explaining how any such adjustment would take place, nor have I attempted to address that here. What *is* accessible to our understanding is some idea of how the soul of Alexander might have made up for such an excessive attachment to the values of the world that he illustrates also in his grief—*his general worldliness*. This his life as a whole, as a citizen of the pagan world he inhabited at that time, inevitably illustrates also, quite apart from those other higher karmic purposes with which Steiner informs us he was associated. In the end it is not impossible to suppose his commitment to one level of his life taking place alongside the other.

In this study[272], I have ventured some speculative thought on how Alexander could have made up for this worldliness in a subsequent life, venturing such thought if only in order to

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[271] See EVERITT, 386, who goes on to remark: "Although he often behaved chivalrously by the standards of his time, even his contemporaries condemned his cruelty, and today he would undoubtedly qualify as a war criminal."

[272] In two parts.

highlight the deep karmic issue that is involved. Likewise for Alexander's obsessive religious fanaticism in his building of pagan temples, which, as we have seen, took the practices of his time well beyond what could be historically viable *for his own evolutionary purposes*, looking ahead to the Christian transformation of his karmic stream, to which he would offer his allegiance in but a few centuries hence. There was also, as I have now also brought this out, the additional problem of death and the tragic response to it, which, as in Gilgamesh's case, clearly Alexander had not resolved for himself, and this in spite of his concurrent engagement in a belief in immortality. At some point between Alexander's incarnation and that of Ita Wegman in whom this Individuality (common to both incarnations) continues in its course, there would also have to have been some form of karmic adjustment in respect of this issue of death, and the problem of death. We might see the Individuality who is concerned here overcoming the problem in its intermediate incarnation as Sigune, in whom the experience is again repeated as she grievingly hangs over the dead body of Schionatulander. She cradles him to herself in a gesture that graphically evokes the Pietà. Here, one might think, the problem of reconciling to death may well have been substantially resolved, in the implicit relation to the example of Christ Jesus who, in *His* death, had destroyed death. Resolved—or, perhaps, not; there are, in any case, the still more forbidding residual issues that arise from this problem of death as a consequence of those dire lengths of despair to which the experience of death drives Gilgamesh, and especially Alexander who in the expression of his grief, as we have seen, acts out an appallingly extreme, gratuitous violence.

And so for the other issues that have been raised in this study, touching on the problems of general worldliness and fanaticism, which must have concerned this Individuality as a consequence of its earlier lives. We have speculated on possible forms that a karmic adjustment to these problems might have taken, not with the notion that these speculations have resolved the matter for us, but rather by way of insisting that these issues would have to be addressed and that solutions to them cannot be easy. Why get into all this at all, some might ask, since as Wegman this Individuality would appear to have finally come free of all such problems? So we suppose, but how do we know this was the case? Had she really come free of them—for example, of the violence of her past, from which the world was still struggling badly in her time, with immediate consequences also for herself in her own life as an anthroposophist? This whole situation could be seen[273] as the result of her far-reaching association at one time with the imperial identity to which, as Alexander, she contributed perhaps as no one else ever has? As for the problem of death, is it believable that such depths of tragic despair as Alexander experiences in the last part of his life (depths which echo Gilgamesh's own despair) should be

[273] And so we have seen it, in Part One of this chapter.

so easily resolved only two incarnations later, in the situation Sigune acts out? To the outsider to anthroposophical culture, it will appear unbelievable that Wegman should be assumed to have appeared so happily in our time after her life as Alexander, or even that of Gilgamesh centuries before. How were the residual problems that remain associated with these figures resolved? Is all history to be discounted, the evidence of which points clearly to severe problems in Alexander's reign; or even such a very troubled and troublesome work as the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, which also belongs to the historical record, in spite of being considered a "fiction" in the conventional view? The record of history cries out against any simple karmic picture such as we are inclined to assume of this Individuality. Accommodating *ourselves*, as we do in this way, does this not involve us in a form of collusion with the violence, fanaticism, general worldliness, and tragic despair that continue to sow their effects in our time? I am not persuaded that Steiner would not have left these issues for *us* to address, given that the time he had in which to lay out the whole picture of our evolutionary history was severely limited and simple lines would have to be cut through the whole. So many outstanding issues remain for us to settle, and the fact is we continue to be answerable for them, as I believe Steiner, or indeed Wegman herself, would have thought.

## Epilogue:

### *Sigune's Grief, from Wolfram von Eschenbach's "Parzival"* [274]

From Book III

> *Now hear what this lady is doing …*
>
> *Lady Sigune, in her wretchedness, was tearing her long brown plaits out from her scalp. The boy* [Parzival] *looked about him—Schionatulander the prince he found dead there in the damsel's lap. She was weary of all mirth … She knew how to lament her sorrow with grief.*

From Book V

> *"I am she, that maiden who lamented her troubles to you before … God reward you that you then so grieved for my beloved, who lay dead of a joust on my behalf. I hold him here. Now judge the duress God has given me on his account—that he should live no longer … His dying pained me then, and ever since, from day to day, I have known new and further sorrow."*

From Book IX

[274] A translation by Cyril Edwards in the Oxford World's Classics series, 2006.

*The adventure tells us that Parzival, the bold warrior, came riding to a forest … There his eyes found a hermit's cell … He found a hermitess … Womanly sorrows' source blossomed ever anew from her heart … Schionatulander and Sigune he found there. The warrior lay dead, buried within. Her life suffered anguish, bent over his coffin … Her whole life was a genuflexion. Her full lips, hot, red-hued, had by now become pallid and pale, for worldly joy had entirely deserted her. Never did maiden suffer such great torment … Because of the love that died with him, the prince not having won her hand, she loved his dead body … The cell was devoid of joy and bare of all mirth. He found nothing there but great grief … Great sorrow was her confidante … Her headdress was sorrowful … She said "I keep him here within … All my wretched years' seasons I will truly grant him love."*

From Book XVI

*Then the templars … rode rapidly away … "Once, in this forest," said Parzival, "I saw a cell standing, through which ran rapidly a fast-flowing lucent spring …" His companions told him that they knew one: "There a maiden lives, all in mourning over her beloved's tomb. She is an ark of true grace. Our journey passes close by her. She is seldom found free of grief."*

*They rode straight on, rapidly, and late that evening found Sigune dead at her genuflexion … grief's extremity. They broke into her cell. Parzival asked that the tombstone be raised. Schionatulander appeared unrotted, handsome, balsam-hued. They laid her in there next to him, she who had given maidenly love to him when she lived, and closed the grave.*

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# AFTERWORD

## Some Additional Refinements to Endnote 6 of Part I

### A Greater Vision for Tomorrow

A full "In-Spiriting" of the Self, when it comes through, opening out, as Shakespeare and Novalis bear witness, onto an experience of the Sophianic Co-inherency of the 3 levels of Self, Nature, and the World, constitutes, at the same time, an "Incursion" at once into the heights and the depths of *Cosmic* Life, which have *correspondingly* 3 levels. There is a progressively deepening "Entrance" into Nature and the World as a whole on a horizontal plane, but this "Entrance" has coincided with and is finally made possible at all by an accompanying vertical "Incursion" into Cosmic Worlds, both higher and lower, whence the forces of transformation derive. Transformation at every level of the Self in its further relation to Nature and the World takes place as a consequence of drawing on the 'light' forces of thought and feeling of the higher world in order to transform (redeem) and, after such, channel and creatively direct the 'dark' forces of will of the lower world. Dark (demonic) nature, both within us and without, is thus transformed, progressively and in greater and greater depth, into light (apocalyptic) nature, as the Self proceeds deeper and deeper into Nature and the World.

The Sun is the central point in the locus of the higher world, and the Earth the full locus of the lower world. Here is the mystery underlying Rembrandt's painting, *The Polish Rider*, as well as Coleridge's poem, *Kubla Khan*, which lies in the historical stream of such understanding, though Coleridge was only made aware of all this initially in his unconscious, his poem (according to his own testimony) emerging intact directly from a dream.[275] Sun and Earth (caverns) are in both the Rembrandt and in Coleridge, as is also the dome or castle/palace, which in Rembrandt very clearly lies atop a mountain lit up by the Sun, and in Coleridge is described as a "sunny dome" and referred to "Mount Abora". The Polish Rider dominates the scene in Rembrandt as does Kubla Khan in Coleridge, both embodiments of the human Self holding everything together as symbolized in the dome, their immediate habitat and the center-point of their creative transformational powers. The mountain in Rembrandt and in Coleridge invokes not only a progression through the graduated spheres of the higher world but a potential

[275] For my discussion of the Rembrandt see Chapter 2 of my book *Riddle of the Sophia*, and for Coleridge in relation to the Rembrandt, *The New School of the Imagination*, p.34 n.27.

lifting up with time into more and more rarefied forms of evolutionary life that emerge from a deeper and deeper progress in those spheres, and of which some Intimation may be given us even today.

We experience the tremendous effect of achievement conveyed in Rembrandt's Rider who is pictured in firm control of the Horse, which is to say of the darker rebellious animal forces stemming from the lower world. Still, the effect in the Rembrandt is of the Earth (with its many caverns beneath, as in Coleridge) potentially *giving way* under the Horse, were it not for the Rider's commanding efforts. So too can Coleridge at least envision such a conscious achievement for himself. The poem emerging verbatim from his dream clearly retains the impression of Coleridge's unconscious struggle with the subversive demonic, romantic-sexual, impulses in him that challenge and threaten his inspiration (being himself the "demon lover" of his dream). However, in the poem's second part, he can further imagine the clear possibility of attaining to deeper control of that process through an inspiration now purified of its demonic components, by giving himself further to the influence of the symbolized "damsel" who, in a vision, also once appeared to him, "playing on her dulcimer." It is She who, as (Sophianic) emissary of the heights, singing of Mount Abora, could potentially provide Coleridge at last with the forces needed to transform from demon-lover into prophetic visionary (a destiny he

was, tragically, finally unable to see through[276]). How ready are we for the idea of a destiny of such greater intensity, his poem finally asks.

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There are fundamental operations and developments at work *behind* the archetypal scene represented in the Rembrandt and in Coleridge. Anthroposophical literature confirms the operation of influences from the higher worlds of the planetary spheres that have the Sun as their center: thus 1) Moon, Venus, and Mercury rising up, as it were, to the Sun 2) the Sun itself and 3) the Sun opening out further onto Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn—influences from 3 spheres each of which bears a different set of evolutionary forces playing into the Self as it develops. First, then, the fully In-Spirited Self breaks through into an experience of "Imagination" (as accounted for in Parts I & II of this collection), by which is understood access to the *first* of the 3 complementary dimensions one finds, moving in *both* directions at once, in the higher *and* lower worlds. This *first* experience (of Imagination) corresponds, on the one higher side, to planetary influences that run from the Moon through to the Sun, and on the other lower side, those dark forces that emerge from the first of the 3 sub-Earthly spheres and are to be transformed (in each of which latter spheres there are 3 sections, as further designated in anthroposophical literature[277]). The whole scene may be filled out from here: "Inspiration," for its part, working out of the Sun sphere and transforming the dark forces of the second of the 3 sub-Earthly spheres, "Intuition" from the still higher sphere that runs from the Sun through to Saturn and so on.[278]

These sub-Earthly spheres are characterized in anthroposophical literature as offering in their forces the demonic counter-resistance that is to be channelled as willed energy through the transformational powers working from above. These dark forces have also been clearly denoted in the literature. Thus, filtering into human nature:

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[276] See my study of Coleridge from this point of view in *The New School of the Imagination*, 2007, pp.9-10, 23 *passim*.

[277] For a full breakdown of these 3 x 3 spheres and their denominations, which derive from Steiner, see Robert Powell's essay in *The Inner Life of the Earth*, ed. Paul V. O'Leary, SteinerBooks, 2008.

[278] From within this full range of planets emerge (in the most rarefied spiritual sense) the ongoing influences of the corresponding Spiritual Hierarchies that have their seat in them. Thus, as traditionally designated: the Exusiai in the sphere of the Sun, the Dynameis in the sphere of Mars and so on (see Steiner's full breakdown of these associations in The *Spiritual Hierarchies and their Reflection in the Physical World*, 1909). Likewise are the sub-Earthly spheres governed by influences stemming from a parallel range of Hierarchies who themselves have *fallen* from divine grace: fallen Angels etc. All of the Hierarchies in question are as denominated traditionally by Dionysius the Areopagite.

1) resistance—to the Spirit—of a materially-minded "obduracy," such as finds expression in cold-hearted, intellectual arrogance, and a "know better than to give oneself to higher worlds" attitude that betrays either a fear, or despair of such.

*

Forces of "obduracy" are transformed into a consciously willed participation in hopeful redemption;

2) resistance—to the Sophia—of various forms of un-chastity, characterized as "rank passion," i.e., violent affectivity originating either with the ego become self-seeking or a sexual drive become unrestrained.

*

"Rank passion" is transformed into reformative compassion (love);

3) resistance—to Christ as World-Ego, Christ-in-God—of the severest forms of "hateful repudiation"

*

"Hateful repudiation" is transformed into evangelical mission (consider, in this last instance, the case of St. Paul after his experience at Damascus)…[279]

A fully filled-out picture of the Initiatory creative process now emerges:

1)

The fully In-Spirited Self, experiencing Imagination, transforms obduracy, despair and fear into a consciously willed participation in hopeful redemption (the symbolic fate of Pericles giving himself up to the influence of Marina).

2)

Now further experiencing Inspiration, on entering the sphere of Nature with the Sophia, the Self finds that it has transformed rank affectivity into reformative compassion and love (the symbolic fate of Leontes giving himself up to the influence of Perdita).

3)

Finally, experiencing Intuition, passing still more deeply into Nature with Sophia, the Self now unites with Christ as the World-Ego (Christ in God) and transforms hateful repudiation into evangelical mission (the symbolic fate of Prospero giving himself up to the influence of Miranda).

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[279] For a further account of these terms, see my *Riddle of the Sophia*, p.77, n.13.

(For the associative links with Shakespeare's characters see, once again, the graphs given above on p.12 including n.45).

(As for Novalis, the 3 stages characterized here correspond to 1) his own breakthrough out of despair into conscious redemptive work on himself (as illustrated in his deep philosophical studies in his Journals and his contributions to Friedrich Schlegel's *Athenaeum*; 2) his emergence at last into reformative love in the sphere of the Sophianic Mother (as illustrated in *Hymns to the Night*); and 3) his prophecy of "a new history and a new humanity" already in evidence and operating, in *Christendom, or Europe*—all this we have seen above.)

We have already invoked the commanding presence and influence of the Sophia in the sphere of "Great Creating Nature" (Shakespeare's phrase in *The Winter's Tale*), the range of whose activity extends to a great height, as seen in Novalis' vision of the Mother. We have additionally invoked the further presence and influence of Christ in the World, which extends still farther, beyond Nature as we know it today, and Who is raising the World progressively into higher and higher spheres, so that Prospero himself can be inspirited by the vision of a World that will one day dissolve and "leave not a rack behind" (this being his Pauline, Damascean moment, as noted above, in n.45). As it progresses in its evolution over time, the In-Spirited Self will indeed proceed into higher and higher, which is to say more and more rarefied, evolutionary worlds—Self, Nature, and World as such, destined to progressively lift off, as it were, in carefully graduated stages, from the still very solid centre-point on Earth in which they are presently grounded. This is to take a far-distant view of the evolution, as we find it developed in Steiner's anthroposophy: as we go along, Imagination, Inspiration, and Intuition will be projected in gradually greater, and more rarefied, degrees of creative expression, depending on the stage of the progress that will be achieved, and naturally *beginning from* where we stand at present. Shakespeare and Novalis are the pre-eminent cases of how the situation looks for us at its farthest reaches at this specific point in cosmic time. However, always the focus will be on the more that is to come.[280]

Finally, the emphasis in these pages has rested largely on the breakthrough-moment of Sophianic experience, to be known in relative measure at every stage of our progression, but, of course, at every point much will have transpired to lead up to such a moment. We bear in mind that a proper activation of the whole system presupposes *first* (as we have seen in Endnote

[280] For some advanced elaborations on this far-reaching vista, the end-goal of which in remote ages hence will be an inheritance of "New Heaven, New Earth," see Robert Powell's *Cultivating Inner Radiance and the Body of Immortality*, 2012, p.105ff.

6 of Part I) an advanced process of *ascesis* or self-confrontation that includes, among other forms of such, pre-eminently the type involved in living through tragic romance, as borne out in the personal experiences reflected in the structure of the work of Shakespeare and Novalis (much discussed above), as well as (ideally) the work of Coleridge. All will be experienced in relative measure from stage to stage, but otherwise, orientation in, and alignment with, the whole operation and destiny we have adumbrated here *is and will be* the key to all progress in the future at any and every point…[281]

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*In Xanadu did Kubla Khan*
*A stately pleasure-dome decree:*
*Where Alph, the sacred river, ran*
*Through caverns measureless to man*
*Down to a sunless sea.*

*So twice five miles of fertile ground*
*With walls and towers were girdled round;*
*And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills,*
*Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;*
*And here were forests ancient as the hills,*
*Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.*

*But oh! that deep romantic chasm which slanted*
*Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover!*
*A savage place! as holy and enchanted*
*As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted*
*By woman wailing for her demon-lover!*
*And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,*
*As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,*
*A mighty fountain momently was forced:*
*Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst*
*Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,*

[281] Much is today available as meditation to help enable (and begin to enable) the process of spiritual-artistic development that has been featured in these pages, most notably Robert Powell's *Cultivating Inner Radiance and the Body of Immortality*, and more classically Rudolf Steiner's *How to Know Higher Worlds* (formerly *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds*). See also the many materials cited in Part I of this collection.

*Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail:*
*And mid these dancing rocks at once and ever*
*It flung up momently the sacred river.*
*Five miles meandering with a mazy motion*
*Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,*
*Then reached the caverns measureless to man,*
*And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean;*
*And 'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far*
*Ancestral voices prophesying war!*
*The shadow of the dome of pleasure*
*Floated midway on the waves;*
*Where was heard the mingled measure*
*From the fountain and the caves.*
*It was a miracle of rare device,*
*A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!*

*A damsel with a dulcimer*
*In a vision once I saw:*
*It was an Abyssinian maid*
*And on her dulcimer she played,*
*Singing of Mount Abora.*
*Could I revive within me*
*Her symphony and song,*
*To such a deep delight 'twould win me,*
*That with music loud and long,*
*I would build that dome in air,*
*That sunny dome! those caves of ice!*
*And all who heard should see them there,*
*And all should cry, Beware! Beware!*
*His flashing eyes, his floating hair!*
*Weave a circle round him thrice,*
*And close your eyes with holy dread*
*For he on honey-dew hath fed,*
*And drunk the milk of Paradise.*

[i]Steiner's fundamental emphasis on a progressive *evolution* in Time serves as the basis for properly understanding our experience of the relationship of mind to nature, which was one full thing in the past (based on their (un-free) union), is another, more reduced thing in the present (basically separated), and will be yet another fuller and more perfected experience (a higher (free) union) in the future. [This is an Endnote to a point made in relation to Barfield's presentation on p.73.—Ed.]